



NIBBĀNA

Nibbāna as True Reality beyond the Debate

by Potprecha Cholvijarn

Nibbāna as True Reality beyond the Debate

some contemporary Thai discussions

by Potprecha Cholvijarn

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Potprecha Cholvijarn

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ABSTRACT

The book concerns the recent debate in Thailand over the nature of *nibbāna* (*nirvāṇa*), the unconditioned, whether it is *attā* (self) or *anattā* (not-self). It is largely based on the thesis submitted to Bristol University published earlier.

Western Buddhist studies, especially of recent years, have assumed that Theravāda Buddhism straightforwardly teaches the doctrine of *anattā*: that Theravāda Buddhism rejects *attā* in all respects, including in the ultimate sense. However, as the well-known debate in Thailand, which reached its zenith in 1999, has shown, there appears to be a significant minority of Theravāda monks, respected by significant numbers of Theravāda laity, arguing that *nibbāna* is *attā*.

This debate can be seen as a manifestation of the Buddhist controversies over the understanding and implications of the *anattā* doctrine, but argued in the perspectives of contemporary Thai Theravāda Buddhism. As it was carried out mainly in Thai language publications of various sorts and makes extensive references from Thai version of the Pāli Tipiṭaka, this book is therefore intended to make use of my fluency in Thai language to bring to light and present something of the history and arguments that inform this debate. What

I have chosen to do is to present in summary, with comment, two important Thai contributions to the debate, namely, *Dhammakāya Case* by P.A. Payutto, which argues that *nibbāna* is *anattā*, and, *The Principle of Examination of Nibbāna-dhātu According to the Words of the Buddha and the Aṭṭhakathā* by Phutthathamprathip, which argues that *nibbāna* is *attā*.

After comparing this debate to the Tibetan *Rang Stong* and *Gzan Stong* dispute, it is concluded that they reveal two similar trends found in the history of Buddhist thought, one positing a substantial absolute beyond all conceptualization, and the other rejecting all kinds of substantial absolute. Both trends are found at various points in the history of Buddhism in different traditions.

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FOREWORD BY

DR. PHRA RAJYANVISITH
(HON. D.)

You hold in your hand an extremely important document. It deals with two key concepts that each one of us must comprehend fully – “Self” and “The Ultimate Goal of Life” – *Nibbāna* or Nirvana.

This book presents a major contemporary debate in Theravada Buddhism which reflects similar disputes throughout the history of Buddhism. It is directed at those seeking to understand the ultimate foundations of what the Buddha taught. The specific issue is whether *Nibbāna* is ‘Self’ or ‘Non-self’. Ajahn Potprecha Cholvijarn summarizes both sides of the argument, but leaves drawing a conclusion up to you, the reader.

I want to emphasize how vital full grasp of both concepts is for each one of us, personally. This is not just an academic issue for scholars to debate. It is a dynamic issue that we must each deal with in our own lives, both in setting our overall course and in a million daily decisions that must be addressed mindfully, based on firm, insightful answers to the questions: Who am I? Where am I going?

SELF

What is “Self” and why is it important? According to the dictionary, “Self” means one’s whole being or one’s characteristic nature or refers to one’s own advantage. “Self Concept” underlies scientific explanations of human behavior. We each divide the world into “me and mine” versus “not mine” and then, driven by craving and ignorance, greedily rush about for a lifetime trying to conquer the world while protecting and aggrandizing our own little niche.

Lord Buddha taught that such a “Self” does not exist. It is just an abstract concept which leads to a muddled view of the world and inappropriate actions. “We” are not a separate, static “thing,” but part of an ever-changing process – part of society and part of nature. And, “we” ourselves are not a whole entity, but a compound of parts which can only continue to function together temporarily.

Lord Buddha teaches that both “we ourselves” and everything else in this world are compound phenomena, which just come into existence temporarily when conditions are right, continue to exist for a time, changing continually while in existence, and then eventually disintegrate or decompose and are no longer in existence.

Sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā

All compound phenomena are impermanent.

Sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā

All compound phenomena are suffering.

Sabbe dhammā anattā

All phenomena are non-self.

NIBBĀNA

What is “*Nibbāna*” and why is it important? First, I need to explain that in Theravada Buddhism we use Pali, the language which Lord Buddha spoke, in place of the written Sanskrit which has been

taken into English. The Sanskrit word for *Nibbāna* is “Nirvana.” It is composed of two components: “Ni-” meaning “to move away from” and “vana” meaning “craving or lust.”

Thus, from the first viewpoint, Nirvana is a mental state – a state free from craving – which can be attained here and now on a temporary basis during meditation. Achieving this state is an important part of Lord Buddha’s mental training. This perception of Nirvana is much more useful than the usual, fatalistic picture as something far off, incomprehensible and essentially unreachable.

This usual picture is the second viewpoint. Here, Nirvana is seen as a realm, far beyond Heaven, outside of time and space, where the enlightened disciples of Lord Buddha continue to be with him eternally, in supreme peaceful happiness. This is *Ayatanā Nibbāna*, Nirvana Residence. This viewpoint can also be very useful, providing us with a goal in life – the ultimate answer to the question “Where am I going?”

Yes, *Ayatanā Nibbāna* is far off; we had better set more immediately achievable sub-goals. But, this perspective says that eternal happiness, the ultimate goal in most religions, IS attainable. Being able to visit during meditation substantiates this conception and makes the seemingly interminable journey bearable. Realizing that we are reborn over and over anyway develops patience for the protracted mission.

The third viewpoint on Nirvana concerns the base sustaining Nirvana as a mental state. Our soiled human minds are clearly incapable of grasping such a concept. That is why we call it incomprehensible. What level of consciousness is competent to deal with Nirvana? Clearly, it must be transcendent, beyond this world.

After presenting his first sermon, the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, Lord Buddha saw that Kondañña, the leader of the Five Ascetics, understood. During the sermon, Kondañña had tran-

scended and even glimpsed Nirvana momentarily. Lord Buddha rejoiced that Kondañña had attained the “Dhamma-Eye” (*Dhammacakkhu*) and renamed him Añña-Kondañña, the Kondañña who sees. This “Dhamma-Eye” level of consciousness is what we now call *Dhammakāya*. It is transcendent. The Most Refined *Dhammakāya Arahant* can sustain Nirvana as a mental state, temporarily. Thus, it is called *Nibbāna Dhātu* or the Nirvana Base Element.

THE DEBATE

What is the argument? Why is it important to Buddhism? Why is it important to you? The Dispute arises from the third line in Lord Buddha’s teaching above.

Sabbe dhammā anattā
All phenomena are non-self.

Textual-based arguments emphasize that Lord Buddha shifted from saying “compound phenomena” to “all phenomena.” Thus, he must have meant Nirvana, which is non-compound, to be included as “non-self.”

Meditation-based positions reflect direct familiarity with Nirvana. Lord Buddha and his enlightened disciples can be seen there. In addition, these challengers assert that the “Three Characteristics” of the compound phenomena of this world, which are impermanence, suffering, and non-self, are just three different perspectives on the same thing. Whatever is impermanent will lead to suffering when it is gone, and cannot be True Self. In contrast, Lord Buddha says of Nirvana that it is eternal and ultimate peaceful happiness. It can, thus, be taken as True Self.

For both Buddhism as a religion and for each of us as individuals, this is a very important issue. It is a question of motivation.

If there is no “Self” in Nirvana, then why should we put in eons of work to get there? As individuals, we all seek eternal life or escape from the cycle of death and rebirth. This is Nirvana. We want to experience it.

In conclusion, I vigorously urge you to meditate and see for yourself. Lord Buddha taught:

*Natthi jhānaṃ apaññassa
Natthi paññā ajhāyato
Yamhi jhānañca paññā ca
Sa ve nibbānasantike*

Without meditation there is no wisdom. Without wisdom there is no meditation. With both meditation and wisdom, One is close to Nirvana.¹

Pencil and paper arguments can go on forever, but direct experience is ultimate knowledge. Nothing else in life is more important. Inner peace is closer than you think.

Phra Rajyanvisith

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August 2554 (2011)

¹ Dhammapada, Bhikkhu Vagga, No. 6.



I INTRODUCTION

1.1 A HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

The contemporary debate in Thailand over the nature of *nibbāna* (*nirvāṇa*), the unconditioned, the ultimate goal of all Buddhists, the state that is attained through enlightenment, whether it is *attā* (self) or *anattā* (not-self), can be seen as a manifestation of the Buddhist controversies over the understanding and implications of the *anattā* doctrine. The problem of the Buddhist doctrine of not-self (*anattā*) is not a new problem. In the history of Buddhist thought many debates and controversies over the understanding of this doctrine have occurred and on some occasions have led to the emergence of new doctrinal schools. The most evident of all is the group of schools dubbed by their opponents as Pudgalavādins, which developed a controversial ‘Doctrine of the Person’. As accepted by modern scholars, the Pudgalavādin School was formed in the third century BCE and survived until the eleventh centuries CE. The Theravāda recorded debates on the controversial doctrine of the *pudgala* in the *Kathāvatthu* in its *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* and placed an emphasis on it by beginning the text with the doctrine.

The Pudgalavādins claim that a *pudgala* (person) or *ātman* (self) is an irreducible entity, which exists in the ultimate as opposed to existing in the conventional sense, and can be known by the six consciousnesses. One cannot determine its existence in its relations to the five aggregates for it is neither reducible to them nor independent of them, being like a fire that is dependent on the five aggregates as fuel.¹ According to the Pudgalavādins, to truly see the Buddha's doctrine of *anātman*, it is to see self neither as non-existent, as the five aggregates nor different from them, but to see it as indeterminate in relations to them.² *Pudgala* exists, is that which transmigrates from life to life, the doer of action and the experiencer of its results. *Pudgala* is a kind of *dharma*, but different from the conditioned and unconditioned *dharmas*. Being supported by the five aggregates, it is impermanent. However, it is also said to be a worldly manifestation of *nirvāṇa*, which attains *nirvāṇa* at enlightenment, and after the passing away of the five aggregates, cannot be said to be non-existent in *nirvāṇa*.³ But as a mere reflection of *nirvāṇa*, its selfhood is only dependent on the five aggregates, therefore, in *nirvāṇa*, it is said to be not self.⁴ The doctrine was strongly opposed by other schools who felt that it is a distortion of the Buddha's doctrine. The *anātman* doctrine maintains that there is no underlying entity, which transmigrates from life to life, but there are only the constantly changing aggregates made up of *dharmas*. A person or self cannot exist beyond the conventional sense. It is only a mere designation, a description used in everyday language of what are ultimately momentary and irreducible *dharmas*. The opponents of the Pudgalavādins argue that in asserting a 'person' as an ultimate existence, the Pudgalavādins falls in to the false eternalists' view, which goes against the *anātman* doctrine.

¹ Leonard C.D.C. Priestley, *Pudgalavāda Buddhism: The Reality of the Indeterminate Self* (Toronto: University of Toronto, Centre for South Asian Studies, 1999), p. 208.

² Priestley, p. 195.

³ Priestley, p. 195.

⁴ Priestley, p. 195.

In case of Theravāda Buddhism whose basis of doctrinal standpoint is based on works such as the *Milinda-pañha*, the *Visuddhimagga*, the commentaries and most importantly the *Kathāvatthu*, western Buddhist studies, especially of recent years, have assumed that Theravāda Buddhism straightforwardly teaches the doctrine of *anattā*. In other words, Theravāda Buddhism rejects *attā* in all respects; it rejects *attā* in the ultimate. However, as the recent debate in Thailand in 1999 over the nature of *nibbāna* has shown, there appears to be a significant minority of Theravāda monks, respected by significant numbers of Theravāda laity, who argue that *nibbāna* is *attā*. The present chapter will outline the background and history to the 1999 *nibbāna: attā* or *anattā* debate in Thailand.

In context of Buddhist Studies, the importance of this debate is that it represents another Buddhist controversy over the understanding and implications of the *anattā* doctrine, but argued in the perspectives of contemporary Thai Theravāda Buddhism. It is a topic that is little known and perhaps misunderstood in western Buddhist studies. As seen in all the works I have mentioned, this debate was carried out mainly in Thai language publications of various sorts and makes extensive references to the Thai version of the Pāli Tipiṭaka. This thesis is therefore intended to make use of my fluency in Thai language to bring to light and present something of the history and arguments that inform this debate. What I have chosen to do is to present in summary, with comment, two important Thai contributions to the debate in the following chapters, namely, *Dhammakāya Case* by Payutto, which argues that *nibbāna* is *anattā* in Chapter 2, and *The Principle of Examination of Nibbāna-dhātu according to the Words of the Buddha and the Aṭṭhakathā* by Phutthathamprathip, which argues that *nibbāna* is *attā* in Chapter 3. The fourth chapter is the commentary chapter, which attempts to contextualize the debate and to answer various possible questions that could be raised by western Buddhist Studies scholars from this debate. As all the sources

quote Pāli passages and then provide Thai translations, I have translated the quoted passages closely to the author's Thai translation (rather than from the Pāli) and using the help of existing English translations of Pāli texts. The Thai authors refer to Thai printed editions of Pāli texts, but I have added references to PTS editions where available. Unless not provided or commonly used in roman script, for the romanization of Thai words into roman script, I use the Thai romanization program created by Wirote Aroonmanakun, Department of Linguistics, Chulalongkorn University (2004), which transcribes Thai words into roman script according to the guideline of the Royal Institute.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE DEBATE

It is possible to trace back the debate on whether *nibbāna* is *attā* or *anattā* in Thailand to the year 1939. Before this year, I cannot find any record of either perspective. According to those who held the *anattā* perspective, a debate of this nature did not usually occur among Theravāda Buddhists but occurred between Mahāyāna Buddhists and the followers of Theravāda Buddhists. They believe that Theravāda Buddhism has always held that *nibbāna* is *anattā* but during the course of its history some people have decided to adopt a Mahāyāna perspective, which is contrary to the Theravāda position. In Thailand, those who held that *nibbāna* is *attā* have been in the minority. Having announced their perspective, some stuck to their position, others changed their views and stated either that *nibbāna* is neither *attā* nor *anattā* or that they only wanted to conventionally call it *attā*. However, for those who held that *nibbāna* is *attā*, the Buddha taught his disciples to discover their own *attā* by pointing out those things that are not *attā*.⁵ *Attā* is discovered only through

⁵ From an interview with Venerable Phra Rajyanvisith at Wat Luang Por Sodh Dhammakayaram, Ratchaburi, 20 August 2003.

one's own practice. Those who took this position saw that *nibbāna* is *attā* through their own practices and meditative experiences and were only stating what they have attained and discovered. Around the year 1939, definite evidence of a *nibbāna* debate is seen in a published work of a prominent young Buddhist scholar and a sermon by the Saṅgharāja. The young monk scholar later to become one of the most famous philosopher monks in Thailand was called Buddhadāsa. Buddhadāsa in 1939 published a work called อนัตตตาของพระพุทธเจ้า (*Anatta khong Phraphut-thachao*) [*Anattā of the Buddha*], which argues that *nibbāna* is *anattā*. In the same year, the Saṅgharāja (Phae Tissadevo), the twelfth Saṅgharāja of the Ratanakosin period edited and compiled the writings and sermons of different scholars and published them in the book called เถรบัญญัติ (*Then Banyat*) [*Therapaññatti*]. One sermon given by the Saṅgharāja in that book argues that *nibbāna* is *attā*. It has been recorded that around that year a Buddhist newspaper opened a column especially for people to send their opinions about their views on whether *nibbāna* is *attā* or *anattā*. I shall outline the arguments of both Buddhadāsa and the Saṅgharāja and will present them in detail for some of the arguments they used are original and are not found in the contemporary works.

1.2.1 Buddhadāsa

Buddhadāsa today is regarded by his followers as a progressive reformer who attempted to develop a thorough reinterpretation of the entire body of Theravāda doctrine.⁶ Buddhadāsa was born in 1906 in the Suratthani province of Southern Thailand. He was ordained at the age of 21 into the Mahanikai [Mahānikāya] order. After a few years studying in Bangkok, Buddhadāsa was dissatisfied with the education he received. He left Bangkok and went back to Suratthani

⁶ Biographical information taken from: Peter A. Jackson, *Buddhadāsa: Theravada Buddhism and Modernist Reform in Thailand* (Chiang Mai: Silksworm Books, 2003).

to live in an abandoned monastery which he later renamed Suan Mokkhaphalaram (Garden of Liberation). Buddhadāsa with the help of his brother started publishing works which became more and more widely recognised. As he gained followers, Suan Mok grew and had to be relocated to its present location of Chaiya, Suratthani. Buddhadāsa was a prolific writer. The number of written works he published increased over the years and surpassed all other Buddhist scholars in Thailand. In 1980, the Buddhist University, Mahachulalongkorn, gave him its first honorary doctorate degree. Buddhadāsa later was promoted to the clerical title of Phra Thamkosachan (Dhammakosācarya). Suan Mokh later established a branch monastery, Wat U Mong, in Chiang Mai. Another monastery associated with Suan Mokh is Wat Chonprathan at Pakkret, Nonthaburi, of which the abbot, the famous Panyananta Bhikkhu [Paññānanda], was a former student of Buddhadāsa. Buddhadāsa died in Suan Mok in 1993.

อนัตตตาของพระพุทธเจ้า (*Anatta khong Phra phutthachao*) [*Anattā of the Buddha*]⁷ is 89 pages long. It is divided into six parts: ‘Introductory Notes’, ‘*Anattā* of the Buddha’, ‘*Anattā* in Other Schools’, ‘Comparison of the Views’, ‘*Attā* that the Buddha Rejects’, ‘*Attā* of Paramattha Thinkers’. It aims to provide the teaching of the Buddha on *nibbāna* as opposed to the teaching of *ātman* in Hinduism and Self in western thought. It first appeared in a book called *Phutthasatsana* [Buddhism] in 1939. According to Buddhadāsa, he wrote this book as a reaction to the arguments in the newspaper called *Phutthasatsana* [Buddhism] which opened one of its columns especially for comments on whether *nibbāna* is *attā* or *anattā*. I have been unable to locate a copy of the original edition. It was reprinted as a book in 1990 with the same title. The thesis will refer to the reprinted edition of 1999. The main points of this book will be summarized. Buddhadāsa argues that the doctrine of *anattā* is a doctrine

⁷ Phra Thamkosachan (Buddhadāsa), อนัตตตาของพระพุทธเจ้า (*Anatta khong Phraphutthachao*) [*Anattā of the Buddha*], (Bangkok: Thammasapha, 1999).

that is unique to Buddhism, that the Buddha refuted the doctrines of *ātman* of other schools prevalent at the time of the Buddha which appeared even before the Buddha was born. Their doctrine of *ātman*, which is attained at the final liberation, bear very close similarities to the Buddhist teachings of *nibbāna*, only that the Buddha did not call *nibbāna attā* or *ātman*. The Buddhist *nibbāna* goes beyond other religions because there is no more *attā* to cling to when it is attained. *Nibbāna* in Buddhism is therefore *anattā*.

Buddhadāsa argues that the *anattā* doctrine is a special teaching which only exists in Buddhism. Many other religions have taught the doctrine of impermanence and suffering but have never gone as far as teaching the doctrine of *anattā*. The aim of all religions is to achieve eternal happiness. Their leaders have described this state of happiness in various ways ranging from an eternal existence in a heavenly kingdom to a union with a Supreme Being. In Buddhism this state is called *nibbāna* in which a mind achieves the highest attainment by letting go of all clinging to self, heavenly kingdom and Supreme Being. Those who are inclined towards spiritualism have attained states of concentration where the mind is free from impurities, but no matter how pure their minds become as long as they have not abandoned the views of self they have not reached the highest. The Buddha went further and discovered the highest state in which the mind is free from the feeling that there is a self.

The *Anattā* doctrine of the Buddha states that all things even in the unconditioned *dhamma* (*asaṅkhata-dhamma*) are not-self. This principle is supported by the words, *sabbe dhammā anattā*,⁸ which means all *dhammas* are not-self. All things can be divided into two natures: that which is conditioned (*saṅkhata-dhamma*) and that which is unconditioned (*asaṅkhata-dhamma*). As for the uncondi-

⁸ S III 132.

tioned, Buddhadāsa described it as ‘without any occurrence of materiality, outside time and without form and size’.⁹ It is incalculable and can only be known by ways of inference with wisdom and reasoning.¹⁰ Even when the mind has *nibbāna* as an object, it must be understood that the mind does not hold *nibbāna* as self, but it is only certain and confident in its inference, for *nibbāna* is not an object that can be sensed.¹¹ Although the happiness of *nibbāna* can be sensed is not the actual unconditioned *dhamma* or *nibbāna* itself.

The two kinds of *dhamma* are neither self nor have their own selves. They only exist as *dhammas*. The seeing of this truth is in order not to hold on to and to abandon all the things that occur in the mind so that the mind does not cling to them as self.¹² In the case of the ordinary person who is unable to abandon the self, the Buddha teaches them to make merit and to refrain from demerit and take the self as refuge.¹³ Taking the self as refuge means that whatever self they cling on to, that self they must depend on until they are able to go beyond the self.¹⁴ When they have gone beyond the self, then, there is no more to depend on, what remains is only *dhammas*.¹⁵ One *dhamma* rises and falls, the other stands still.¹⁶ That is why it is said that the Noble One (*arahant*) is beyond good and evil, because the Noble One is beyond the view that there is self.¹⁷ Someone who is beyond the self does not end up having a self again.¹⁸ Therefore, seeing *nibbāna* as self is not the view of the Buddha.¹⁹

⁹ Phra Thamkosachan, p. 13.

¹⁰ Phra Thamkosachan, p. 13.

¹¹ Phra Thamkosachan, p. 14.

¹² Phra Thamkosachan, p. 15.

¹³ Phra Thamkosachan, p. 17.

¹⁴ Phra Thamkosachan, p. 17.

¹⁵ Phra Thamkosachan, pp. 17-18.

¹⁶ Phra Thamkosachan, p. 18.

¹⁷ Phra Thamkosachan, p. 18.

¹⁸ Phra Thamkosachan, p. 18.

¹⁹ Phra Thamkosachan, p. 18.

In the third part: *Anattā* in Other Schools, Buddhadāsa gives the example of the Buddha's former teachers, Ālāra and Uddaka, who according to Buddhadāsa taught that 'when the mind reaches the purest, the self that recognizes that very state is called *ātman*, which must be achieved to be able to reach an end to suffering.'²⁰ Ālāra saw that the way to achieve *ātman* is to reach the formless absorption of the sphere of nothingness (*ākiñcaññāyatana*). As for Uddaka, *ātman* is achieved by reaching the formless absorption of the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception (*nevasaññā-nāsaññāyatana*). The 'knower'²¹ of the state is *ātman*. Buddhadāsa believes that the Buddha 'left these teachers because they had not abandoned the self'.²²

Moreover, according to Buddhadāsa, the Upaniṣadic Vedānta doctrine of *ātman* bears similarities to the Buddhist *nibbāna*. It states that 'when one has the highest wisdom and purity, all worldly *dhammas* (*lokiyadhammas*) will break off from the mind, then, *ātman* will appear to that person'.²³ It is called liberation or *mokṣa*. When one is liberated, one will see that *ātman* exists everywhere and exists as one which is called Brahman. *Ātman* is the same as Brahman but it is only divided from Brahman because the worldly *dhamma* cover it.²⁴ Buddhadāsa claims that some Mahāyānist believe that the Vedāntic *ātman* is equivalent to *nibbāna*.

Buddhadāsa argues that when Ālāra, Uddaka and the Vedānta spoke in this way even before the Buddha became enlightened, if the Buddha thought that *nibbāna* was *attā*, why did he not become a follower of these teachers and school of thought?²⁵ Why did he choose

²⁰ Phra Thamkosachan, p. 27.

²¹ Phra Thamkosachan, p. 28.

²² Phra Thamkosachan, p. 29.

²³ Phra Thamkosachan, pp. 30-31.

²⁴ Phra Thamkosachan, p. 31.

²⁵ Phra Thamkosachan, p. 32. It is also important to note that the Vedānta school of thought may not have existed at the time of the Buddha. Buddhadāsa argument here may not be historically correct.

to abandon their practices of searching for *ātman* that is an end to suffering? It is because all of the above views fall into the eternalism (*sassata-ditṭhi*). The Buddhist position on the unconditioned *dhamma* is that although it exists and is permanent and without arising and cessation, it is not self.

In the fifth part: *Attā* that the Buddha Rejects, in order to support his argument, Buddhadāsa cites the *Poṭṭhapāda Sutta*.²⁶ In this *sutta*, a wandering ascetic named Poṭṭhapāda goes to the Buddha and asks him about the cessation of *saññā* or the state of *saññāvedayitanirodha-samāpatti*. The Buddha clarifies Poṭṭhapāda that the arising and the cessation of *saññā* is either the coming and going of *attā* or the creation of a higher being nor something that is without cause and effect. There are teachers who think that there is *attā* and that when one dies the *attā* will attain perfect happiness, when they are asked whether or not they know of that *attā*, or the place where that *attā* achieves highest happiness, or whether their practices will lead to this happiness, or whether they have heard the voice of a celestial being confirming their views; they refuse to answer all of these questions.²⁷ The Buddha teaches the abandoning of this *attā*. When he was asked where the *attā* is, he replies that it is where one clinging lies, whatever one clings to as *attā* that is what they should abandon.²⁸ There are only three possible kinds of *attā* one can find: *attā* in the crude material body made up of the four elements; *attā* that is the body made of the mind element complete with faculties; an *attā* that is not a material body made up of *saññā*.²⁹ Therefore, Buddhadāsa concludes that there is no clinging beyond these three *attā*. When one has abandoned the three *attā*, the mind brightens and becomes filled with wisdom and happiness.³⁰ However, at this point some

²⁶ D I 177.

²⁷ Phra Thamkosachan, p. 47.

²⁸ Phra Thamkosachan, p. 47.

²⁹ Phra Thamkosachan, pp. 48-49.

³⁰ Phra Thamkosachan, pp. 53-54.

people take this state of mind as *attā* once more and are convinced that this is the *attā* that the Buddha teaches them to attain by abandoning the lower *attā*.³¹ But they do not realize that the *attā* that they cling to once more is only *lokasamaññā* (worldly convention), *lokanirutti* (worldly language), *lokavohāra* (worldly diction) and *lokapaññatti* (worldly designation), as it is stated in the *Poṭṭhapāda Sutta*.³² *Attā* is only the worldly words of those who are ignorant for if they still have the desire to cling on to *attā*, no matter how little, they still do not know *nibbāna*.³³ *Nibbāna* only appears when all clinging to any kind of *attā* has been eradicated.

Buddhadāsa argues that *attā* in the ultimate or *attā* in the *paramattha* is not taught anywhere in the Tipiṭaka. The Buddha has never taught this kind of *attā* but some people have invented this idea and claimed that they are the words of the Buddha. This is in fact conforming to the idea of *ātman* that has existed in Indian thought before and after the time of the Buddha.

Buddhadāsa argues that the *Bhagavadgītā* doctrine bears many similarities to the Buddhist doctrine of *nibbāna* only that there is *ātman* in the ultimate. Saying that *nibbāna* is *attā* is in fact contradicting the words of the Buddha and accepting the Hindu view because the Buddha did not teach his followers to search for *ātman*, but to abandon all clinging to self. The saying, *attā hi attano nātho*³⁴ which means ‘self is one’s refuge’, means that the self, which is suffering must depend on itself to practise the Dhamma until there is no clinging to self.³⁵ Then, when there is no more clinging, there is nothing else one should depend on.³⁶ There is no need to depend on

³¹ Phra Thamkosachan, p. 54.

³² Phra Thamkosachan, p. 55.

³³ Phra Thamkosachan, p. 55.

³⁴ Dhṛ 380.

³⁵ Phra Thamkosachan, pp. 66-67.

³⁶ Phra Thamkosachan, p. 67.

nibbāna because *nibbāna* is only one kind of *dhamma*.³⁷ *Anattā of the Buddha* concludes that the Buddha denies *attā* in all respects, both in the conditioned and in the unconditioned *dhamma*, in other words, he denies *attā* in both the ignorance and the wisdom.

As already mentioned, Buddhādāsa wrote this work to clarify what he believed is the teaching of the Buddha on *nibbāna*. The fact that he suddenly wrote a book arguing that *nibbāna* is *anattā* does suggest that he was responding to a contemporaneous idea that it is *attā*. It is clear from the book itself that Buddhādāsa wrote it as a reaction to the different arguments that *nibbāna* is *attā* published in a regular column of a newspaper called *Phutthasatsana*. I went to the National Library of Thailand to search for this newspaper. The actual newspaper could not be found. The catalogue does list a book, which is a compilation of important articles posted in that newspaper. The articles date from 1933 onwards. But the book was lost. This raises the questions of whether Buddhādāsa may have been countering views that were prior to 1939 and of how far back the debate actually goes. I cannot answer the question definitely, but I could make an informed speculation that from the history of Buddhist thought, from the nature and seriousness of the debate in 1939 and from the records I have since then, it is very likely that the debate may have gone back to earlier than 1939.

1.2.2 Saṅgharāja (Phae Tissadevo)

In the same year as the publication of *Anattā of the Buddha*, the Saṅgharāja (Phae Tissadevo), 12th Saṅgharāja of the Ratanakosin period published a book compiling sermons and essays by different scholars called ฅรบ้ญญัฒิ (*Then Banyat*) [*Therapaññatti*].³⁸ It is 422

³⁷ Phra Thamkosachan, p. 67.

³⁸ ฅรบ้ญญัฒิ (*Then Banyat*) [*Therapaññatti*], ed. by the Saṅgharāja (Phae Tissadevo) (Bangkok: Hosono Athon Kan Phim, 2001).

pages long and consists of 32 headings divided into five sections. It has many authors both Thai and foreign, and addresses many topics related to Theravāda Buddhism and Mahāyāna Buddhism. Some of the works seem to be sermons, some articles and others poems. The sermons of the Saṅgharāja occupy the first section, which is separated into 12 headings. The original copy of the book does not give its publisher or the place of publication. In this thesis, I refer to a 2001 reprint. In the fourth sermon of the Saṅgharāja called ‘Attānudiṭṭhi’ (‘View of Self’), 21 pages long, the Saṅgharāja argues that the uniqueness of the Buddhist doctrine of *anattā* is realised once *attā* has been attained. The Buddha discovered that *nibbāna* is *attā* and only by doing so, was able to say that the five aggregates are *anattā*. The *anattā* doctrine of the Buddha is the doctrine found only in Buddhism because the Buddha realised *attā* that is different from conditioned *dhammas*. *Nibbāna* is therefore the self which the Buddha taught his disciples to depend on and to search for in their practices. *Nibbāna* is the purity of an object, it is void of defilements and once it is reached there is no more clinging. As purity, it must be situated within an object. That object is self. *Anattā* is a tool that the Buddha uses for this disciples to reject the conditioned *dhamma* and to accept *nibbāna*. If *nibbāna* is *anattā*, then, *nibbāna* is to be rejected and there would be no purpose in practising the Noble Eight-fold Path.

The Saṅgharāja lived from 1856 to 1944.³⁹ He resided mainly at Wat Suthat Dhepararam Rachaworamahawihan (Wat Suthat), Bangkok. He was appointed the Saṅgharāja towards the very end of his life in 1938. Today, he is known widely as the maker of the Wat Suthat amulets which are regarded as very sacred.

³⁹ Biographical information taken from: *Phra Prawat Somdetphrasangkharat Haeng Krung Rattanakosin 19 Phra-ong (The Biography of the 19 Saṅgharāja of Rattanakosin Period)*, ed. by Thammasapha (Bangkok: Thammasapha, 2000), p. 186.

In Attānudiṭṭhi, the Saṅgharāja explains that the word *attānudiṭṭhi* means the view that the five aggregates, which are conditioned *dhamma*, are self. When it is stated that the searching for a self is like searching for whiskers of a turtle or a horn of a rabbit, it does not mean the whiskers and horn do not exist, but only that they do not exist on a turtle's mouth or on a rabbit's head.⁴⁰ We would not know what whiskers and a horn are if they did not exist at all. Cats have whiskers and deer have horns. Similarly to *attā*, *attā* is not found in the five aggregates, but that does not mean *attā* does not exist at all. *Attā* exists, but it is found in *nibbāna*. The Buddha could not have said the five aggregates are *anattā*, if he had not discovered that *nibbāna* is *attā*.

When the conditioned side is worldly, evil, impermanent and leads to death, it must be discarded, but the unconditioned side, which is supra-mundane, good, permanent and undying must be received.⁴¹ Therefore if there is no receiving side, the *attā* side, there would be no discarding side, the *anattā* side.⁴²

Nibbāna or *virāga-dhamma* (*dhamma* having the quality of absence of desire) is the name of purity.⁴³ That purity cannot exist alone; it must have an object where it is situated, for example, the purity of water, the cleanness of clothes, etc.⁴⁴ If one has washed oneself from impurities, the result of the washing is cleanliness of the body.⁴⁵ Then, when one is asked where the cleanliness is, one must point at the self.⁴⁶ The self is where the cleanliness is situated.⁴⁷ The self is the receiver of the fruit of the purity, as the Buddha

⁴⁰ *Then Banyat*, pp. 20 - 21.

⁴¹ *Then Banyat*, p. 22.

⁴² *Then Banyat*, p. 22.

⁴³ *Then Banyat*, p. 22.

⁴⁴ *Then Banyat*, pp. 22-23.

⁴⁵ *Then Banyat*, p. 23.

⁴⁶ *Then Banyat*, p. 23.

⁴⁷ *Then Banyat*, p. 23.

says, *anejaṃ nhātakam buddhaṃ tam ahaṃ brūmi brāhmaṇaṃ*,⁴⁸ the one who is unshaken, who has washed oneself, is awakened, is regarded as a brahman. A brahman in this saying is the Noble One (*arahant*). *Virāga-dhamma*, the purity of the unconditioned *dhamma* (*asaṅkhata-dhamma*), is *attā*, in other words, the mind (*citta*) is *attā* but only the mind that is purified from the conditioned *dhamma* (*saṅkhata-dhamma*).

The Saṅgharāja explains that it is true that *attā* is only conventional (*sammuti*) and designated (*paññatti*). However, this does not mean that taking out the designation, there would be nothing left. Things, which are seen by the eyes and understood by wisdom, are not yet conventional and designated until they are thought about, given a name and have that name pronounced to others.⁴⁹ The object must exist in the first place for it to be designated. There could be no designation without an object. *Attā* is designation but it is designated from an object that exists therefore *attā* does not cease to exist when the designation is taken out.⁵⁰ The harm is from clinging to *attā*, not from designating it.⁵¹ The expression *asmi-māna* means the holding that I am, for example, I am the five aggregates, but it does not mean the holding that there is I.

Moreover, the Saṅgharāja argues that in order to follow the saying, *attā hi attano nātho*, self is one's refuge, one must take *nibbāna* as refuge and should not reject it.⁵² Taking *nibbāna* as refuge does not mean clinging onto the designation of *nibbāna*. When one reaches *nibbāna*, there is no more clinging. Those who cling to *nibbāna* is actually clinging to the five aggregates viewed as *nibbāna*.

⁴⁸ M II 196.

⁴⁹ *Then Banyat*, pp. 24-25.

⁵⁰ *Then Banyat*, p. 25.

⁵¹ *Then Banyat*, p. 25.

⁵² *Then Banyat*, p. 26.

In the Brahmanic religion, the mind is self and it is called *ātman*. When the mind does not reach the purity of *nibbāna*, the view that the mind is *ātman* is incorrect. The mind is composed of the unconditioned element (*asaṅkhata-dhātu*) and the conditioned *dhamma* (*saṅkhata-dhamma*). It is like the natural gold which still has impurities.⁵³ Therefore the mind (*citta*) is designated as *anattā* in the Aṭṭhakathā to use it as a preliminary practice before stepping onto the higher Dhamma.⁵⁴ *Attā* that the world designated, even before the time of the Buddha, referred to the body, hence this designation is incorrect. Only when one achieves the eyes of wisdom and one's unconditioned element gains purity, then, one is able to see that the five aggregates the world clings to are *anattā*. It is the reason why the doctrine of *anattā* only exists in Buddhism for other gurus do not know *attā* because they have not practised the Noble Eightfold Path. Other gurus in the past have discovered impermanence (*aniccam*) and suffering (*dukkham*), but they did not discover *anattā* because they have not reached *nibbāna* which is *attā*.

The saying, *sabbe dhammā anattā*, all *dhammas* are *anattā*, refers to only the conditioned *dhamma*. Even if 'all *dhammas*' may include *nibbāna*, it must be understood as referring to the unconditioned element that has not gained purity to become *virāga-dhamma*.⁵⁵ Then the Saṅgharāja cites the saying, *yāvatā bhikkhave saṅkhatā vā asaṅkhatā vā virāgo tesam aggam akkhāyati*,⁵⁶ "monks, whatever conditioned or unconditioned *dhammas* there are, I declare *virāga* to be the highest supreme among them."⁵⁷ Three kinds of *dhammas* are identified: the conditioned *dhamma* (*saṅkhata-dhamma*) that defiles and rises and falls; the unconditioned *dhamma* (*asaṅkhata-dhamma*) that stands stable and is per-

⁵³ *Then Banyat*, p. 26.

⁵⁴ *Then Banyat*, p. 27.

⁵⁵ *Then Banyat*, p. 32.

⁵⁶ A II 34.

⁵⁷ *Then Banyat*, p. 32.

manent; and the *virāga-dhamma*, the purity that is *nibbāna*.⁵⁸ One is like an object, the other, the impurities of the object, and the last, the purity of the object. *Nibbāna* is the unconditioned *dhamma*, which has been purified of the conditioned *dhamma* to become *virāga-dhamma*. The purpose of the Noble Eightfold Path is to separate the unconditioned *dhamma* from the conditioned *dhamma*.

The Saṅgharāja refutes another saying that the proponents of the *anattā* perspective like to cite: *puttā m'atthi dhana m'atthi iti bālo vihaññati attā hi attano n'atthi kuto puttā kuto dhanam*⁵⁹ meaning “The fool would be troubled by the view ‘I have a son, I have wealth’. When he does not have himself, how could he say that he has a son and wealth?”. It is to be understood that the *anattā* in this saying refers to the conditioned *dhamma*. It does not refer to the supramundane side at all. The words ‘son’ and ‘wealth’ clearly indicate that this refers to only the worldly side.⁶⁰

Moreover, in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, when the Buddha was fatally ill and inflicted with pain, he entered *animittacetosamādhi* (signless concentration). In the *samādhi*, what was left remaining was the purified unconditioned *dhamma* and so the Buddha did not feel any pain.⁶¹ During this illness, Ānanda was worried about the Buddha and often came to see him to ask of his condition.⁶² At one time the Buddha said, ‘Ānanda, when I entered *animittacetosamādhi*, the pain stopped and the illness eased.’ Then the Buddha said, ‘*tasmā-tihānanda attadīpā viharatha attasaraṇā anañña-saraṇā*’,⁶³ meaning ‘Ānanda, you should have self as an island, have self as refuge, do not have other things as refuge’. The reason why the Buddha said this to Ānanda is because the Buddha used

⁵⁸ *Then Banyat*, p. 32.

⁵⁹ *Dhp* 62.

⁶⁰ *Then Banyat*, p. 34.

⁶¹ *Then Banyat*, p. 36.

⁶² *Then Banyat*, p. 36.

⁶³ *D II* 100.

animittaceto-samādhi to stop the pain, the *animitta-cetosamādhi* is the purified unconditioned *dhamma* which is *nibbāna*.⁶⁴ It is what the Buddha called *attā*.

Another story found in the *Vinaya*⁶⁵ states that thirty young men who called themselves *Bhaddavaggīyas* were looking for a woman who had escaped from them after stealing their ornaments.⁶⁶ The men went to ask the Buddha where the woman went explaining to him what had happened.⁶⁷ Then, the Buddha said to them, you all should consider whether it is better to look for the woman or to look for the self.⁶⁸ The *Bhaddavaggīyas* decided it is better to look for the self.⁶⁹ The Buddha then preached them the Dhamma. The *Saṅgharāja* explains that normally an ordinary person understands that the body is the self, but when the Buddha asked the *Bhaddavaggīyas* whether it is better to look for a woman or to look for the self, they must have wondered why they must look for the self when it is to be found in the body.⁷⁰ Therefore there must be a different self, which is more special, that the Buddha has discovered and was about to direct them towards.

The sermon concludes that it is not correct to say that there is no *attā* because the Buddha would not have said these things if there were not an *attā*.⁷¹ However, the *attā* of the Buddha is ‘mysterious’.⁷² This is why the Buddha directed the *Bhaddavaggīyas* to search for the self and why the Buddha taught the *Pañcavaggīyas* that the five aggregates are not self.⁷³

⁶⁴ *Then Banyat*, p. 36.

⁶⁵ *Vin I* 23.

⁶⁶ *Then Banyat*, p. 37.

⁶⁷ *Then Banyat*, p. 37.

⁶⁸ *Then Banyat*, p. 37.

⁶⁹ *Then Banyat*, p. 37.

⁷⁰ *Then Banyat*, p. 37.

⁷¹ *Then Banyat*, p. 37.

⁷² *Then Banyat*, p. 37.

⁷³ *Then Banyat*, pp. 37-38.

No more writing about *attā*, *anattā* and *nibbāna* published in that year could be found. It is not clear who or which group of people the Saṅgharāja was responding to. The content of his sermon may seem to counter some of the arguments raised by Buddhadāsa, but this is most likely because most of the arguments raised by *anattā* side at the time were similar to Buddhadāsa's. The Saṅgharāja was most likely not responding directly to Buddhadāsa. The nature of Buddhist sermons is that although the preacher may talk about a specific issue of concern at the time, they tend to generally preach an understanding of the topic without referring to a particular person or party. This sermon by the Saṅgharāja is no exception.

1.2.3 Luang Pho Wat Paknam, Phra Mongkhon Thepmuni (Sot Candasaro)

Fifteen years later, another claim that *nibbāna* is *attā* was made by a prominent meditation teacher. His name is linked with the miracles surrounding his amulets and a meditation method called *thammakai*. The monk later to become known as Luang Pho Wat Paknam, Phra Mongkhon Thepmuni (Sot Candasaro) was born in 1884 in Supanburi province.⁷⁴ He was ordained at the age 20 and later moved to study in Phra Chetuphon Wimonmangkharam (Wat Pho), Bangkok. After he was satisfied with his studies of the scriptures and meditation, he moved to find solitude in a monastery in Nonthaburi. On the full-moon night of the tenth month, 1916, he sat down and made a resolution that if he did not discover the Dhamma of the Buddha, he would not get up from his seat until his life was ended (echoing the resolve of the Buddha beneath the bodhi tree). On this night, his fol-

⁷⁴ Biographical information taken from: Phra Samarn Kusalajitto, ed., *ชีวประวัติและผลงานของหลวงพ่อดอกปากน้ำพระมงคลเทพมุนี (สด จนฺทสโร) Chiwaprawat Lae Phonngan Khong Luang Pho Wat Paknam, Phra Mongkhon Thepmuni (Sodh Candasaro) (Biography and Works of Luang Pho Wat Paknam, Phra Mongkhon Thepmuni (Sodh Candasaro))*, (Bangkok: HTP Press, 2000).

lowers believe, Luang Pho Wat Paknam rediscovered the *thammakai* meditation method which had been lost some time during the five-hundred years after the Buddha's death. In 1916, Luang Pho Wat Paknam was appointed abbot of Wat Paknam, Phasicharoen, Thonburi, Bangkok, by the Saṅgha committee in order to restore the abandoned monastery. Luang Pho Wat Paknam developed the monastery to become a centre of meditation and scriptural studies and also renovated and built many buildings around the monastery. As the number of monks and novices grew, Luang Pho Wat Paknam took all the responsibilities in providing food for those new monks and novices. He also took care of his mother and accommodated her in the monastery towards the end of her life. In 1957, he was given the clerical title of Phra Mongkhon Thepmuni. Luang Pho Wat Paknam was widely known for the amulets he made as gifts for the laity who helped to build the scriptural studies school. In his life, Luang Pho Wat Paknam made altogether three models of amulets. Luang Pho Wat Paknam died in 1959.

The *thammakai* meditation method, first taught by Luang Pho Wat Paknam, claims to directly follow the Noble Eightfold Path and consists of calm meditation (*samatha*) and insight meditation (*vipassanā*) in itself. Today, it has become widely practised. *Thammakai* meditation incorporates three methods of meditation directed at the centre of the body. The three methods are: meditating on an object of visualisation (*kaṣiṇa*), the recollection of the Buddha (*buddhānussati*) and mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasati*), all of which are applied simultaneously at the centre of the body two finger breadths above the navel.⁷⁵ The *thammakai* object of visualisation is the light sphere (*āloka-kaṣiṇa*), usually a luminous sphere or a translucent Buddha statue. The recollection of the Buddha is cultivated by a mantra of *sammā araham* which signifies

⁷⁵ Phra Ajahn Maha Sermchai Jayamangalo, *The Heart of Dhammakāya Meditation*, 2nd edn, (Bangkok: Dhammakaya Buddhist Meditation Foundation, 1997), p. 23.

the Buddha's wisdom and purity. The meditator repeats the mantra at the same time visualising the object at the centre of the body. One also stays mindful of the breath touching a fixed point at the centre of the body. Once the light sphere is visualised with proper concentration, a bright sphere will appear at the centre of the body. 'Luang Pho Wat Paknam discovered that the mind naturally resides at the centre of the body.'⁷⁶ The bright sphere that the meditator sees is the meditator's own mind or what is called the sphere of '*pa hama-magga*' or the 'Dhamma sphere'. It is called the Dhamma sphere because all right action, right speech and right thought lead to the mind becoming purer.⁷⁷ From this point, there exist internal spheres which lead to internal bodies within the human body. When the mind achieves a purer state, the centre of the body expands and the refined human body (*manussakāya*) will appear. As the mind is purified further and further by stopping still at the centre of the body, more internal bodies will appear. Within the Human Bodies are the crude and refined Celestial Bodies (*dibbakāya*), the crude and refined Brahma Bodies (*rūpabrahmakāya*) and the crude and refined formless Brahma Bodies (*arūpabrahmakāya*). These eight bodies, the crude and refined human bodies included, are considered as conditioned. However, when the mind reaches the purest state, the unconditioned Dhamma Body (*dhammakāya*) will appear. 'It looks like a transparent Buddha statue with a lotus-bud upon the head.'⁷⁸ It is luminous, radiant and as clear as diamond. As the meditator concentrates at the centre of the body, more and more refined inner Dhamma Bodies will appear. These are *dhammakāya gotrabhū* (noble-state wisdom) and refined *dhammakāya gotrabhū*, *dhammakāya sotāpanna* (stream-winner) and refined *dhammakāya sotāpanna*, *dhammakāya sakadāgāmī* (once-returner) and refined *dhammakāya sakadāgāmī*, *dhammakāya anāgāmī* (non-returner) and re-

⁷⁶ Phra Ajahn Maha Sermchai Jayamangalo, p. 23.

⁷⁷ Phra Ajahn Maha Sermchai Jayamangalo, p. 28.

⁷⁸ Phra Ajahn Maha Sermchai Jayamangalo, p. 30.

finer *dhammakāya anāgāmī* and *dhammakāya arahatta* (perfect one) and refined *dhammakāya arahatta*. Luang Pho Wat Paknam gives the approximate size of each body. As one reaches the inner bodies, each inner body expands to be bigger, covering the previous outer one, so that when one reaches the *dhammakāya arahatta*, it is said to be approximately forty metres or more in lap-width, height and diameter. All the Dhamma Bodies are unconditioned. There exist at least eighteen internal bodies, eight of which are conditioned and ten of which (the Dhamma Bodies) are unconditioned. When the meditator reaches the Dhamma Bodies, the meditator is temporarily at the purest. Having rested one's mind at the centre of the *dhammakāya arahatta*, one will reach *āyatana nibbāna*, the sphere where the *dhammakāya arahattas* of the *arahants* and Buddhas exist. *Thammakai* meditation also incorporates *vipassanā* meditation: when the meditator reaches *dhammakāya*, the meditator is able to see that all the mundane bodies (human to formless Brahma bodies) are composed of the five aggregates and are impermanent, suffering and not self. At this level, the meditator also contemplates higher Dhamma such as the Four Noble Truths and Dependent Origination.

In 1949, a concise teaching of Luang Pho Wat Paknam was published, called คู่มือสมภาร พระธรรมเทศนาย่อยของหลวงพ่อดอกฟ้า พระมงคลเทพมุนี (สด จนฺทสโร) (Khumue Somphan Phra Tham Thetsana Yo Khong Luang Pho Wat Paknam, Phra Mongkhon Thep Muni (Sodh Candasaro)) [The Abbot's Handbook: the Concise Teaching of Luang Pho Wat Paknam, Phra Mongkhon Thep Muni (Sodh Candasaro)]. I shall refer to the version republished in *Biography and Works*. Luang Pho Wat Paknam describes *nibbāna* as a dwelling place or *āyatana*. It is an *āyatana* higher and more refined than the worldly *āyatana*.⁷⁹ Where the worldly *āyatana* attracts living creatures that are attached

⁷⁹ *Biography and Works*, p. 315.

to the world and the *āyatana* of the eyes, nose, ears, tongue, body and mind attract form, smell, sound, taste, touch and mental objects, in the same manner, *āyatana nibbāna* attracts the Buddhas and the *arahants* to their own *āyatana*.⁸⁰ *Āyatana nibbāna* is the dwelling place of the Buddhas and the *arahants*.⁸¹ Whereas the Buddhas and *arahants* that dwell in *āyatana nibbāna* are called *phra nibbāna*.⁸² One is able then to distinguish between two aspects of *nibbāna* from this explanation by Luang Pho Wat Paknam: one is the *āyatana nibbāna*, which is the dwelling place, and the other is the actual Buddhas and *arahants* that dwell in *āyatana nibbāna*, which is called *phra nibbāna*.

Nibbāna is also the place where the Dhamma Body dwells and is located at the centre of the Dhamma Body.⁸³ That is to say, when the Buddhas and *arahants* still possess the Human Bodies, using the Dhamma Bodies to cultivate *samāpatti*, the most refined Dhamma Body will enter *nibbāna* within the centre of its body.⁸⁴ It is called *saupādisesa-nibbāna* (*nibbāna* with the substratum of life remaining) and appears as a clear and pure sphere.⁸⁵ It is *nibbāna* of those who still possess the five aggregates. One can then distinguish another aspect of *nibbāna*, which is *nibbāna* as a clear and pure sphere within the Dhamma Body of the Buddhas and *arahants* while they are still alive.

When the Buddhas' and *arahants*' five aggregates perish at death, the Dhamma Body will enter *anupādisesa-nibbāna* (*nibbāna* without any substratum of life remaining). *Anupādisesa-nibbāna* is equated with *āyatana nibbāna* where *phra nibbāna* or Dhamma

⁸⁰ *Biography and Works*, p. 315.

⁸¹ *Biography and Works*, p. 315.

⁸² *Biography and Works*, p. 315.

⁸³ *Biography and Works*, p. 318.

⁸⁴ *Biography and Works*, p. 318.

⁸⁵ *Biography and Works*, p. 318.

Bodies that attained *arahatta-phala* dwell. In the book, Luang Pho Wat Paknam gives the measurement of the diameter of *āyatana nibbāna*. It is completely round, and has two outer edges. The Three Realms of Existence and Lokantara also share these characteristics. However, *āyatana nibbāna* is unconditioned, pure and white with radiance. It is a spacious place, brilliantly bright with the radiance of Dhamma, a radiance of purity from defilements and ignorance.⁸⁶ *Āyatana nibbāna* is beyond the ways of the Realms of Existence; there is no earth, water, fire, wind, no sun, no moon, no going, no coming, no standing, no arising and no birth.⁸⁷

In a sermon called ‘Tilakkhaṇādikāthā’ (‘Sermon on the Three Characteristics’) given in 1954,⁸⁸ Luang Pho Wat Paknam explains that the statement ‘all *dhamma* are *anattā*’ refers to *saṅkhāras* or the conditioned only. The word *dhamma* refers to the clear sphere that a human being gains from purity in action, speech and mind. The crude and the refined human bodies, the crude and the refined celestial bodies, the crude and the refined Brahma Bodies and the crude and the refined formless Brahma Bodies, all have Dhamma Spheres which are *anattā* and are only conventional.

The five aggregates of the human body are impermanent and suffering and the Dhamma Sphere of the Human Body is not self. The five aggregates of the refined Human Body are impermanent and suffering and the Dhamma Sphere of the refined Human Body is not self. The five aggregates of the Celestial Bodies are impermanent and suffering the Dhamma Spheres of celestial bodies are not self. The five aggregates of the Brahma Bodies are impermanent and suffering the Dhamma Spheres of Brahma Bodies are not self. The five aggregates of the Formless Brahma Bodies are impermanent and

⁸⁶ *Biography and Works*, p. 315.

⁸⁷ *Biography and Works*, pp. 315-316.

⁸⁸ *Biography and Works*, pp. 224 -237.

suffering the Dhamma Spheres of Formless Brahma Bodies are not self. To sum up, the five aggregates and the Dhamma Spheres of all the mundane bodies are impermanent, suffering and not self. They are only conventional.

However, the *dhammakāya* is permanent and happy and the Dhamma Sphere of the *dhammakāya* is self. The *dhammakāya gotrabhū* and the refined *dhammakāya gotrabhū* are permanent and happy and the spheres of these bodies are self. The *dhammakāya sotā-panna* and the refined *dhammakāya sotāpanna* are permanent and happy and the spheres of these bodies are self. The *dhammakāya sakadāgāmī* and the refined *dhammakāya sakadāgāmī* are permanent and happy and the spheres of these bodies are self. The *dhammakāya anāgāmī* and the refined *dhammakāya anāgāmī* are permanent and happy and the spheres of these bodies are self. The *dhammakāya arahatta* and the refined *dhammakāya arahatta* are permanent and happy and the spheres of these bodies are self. To sum up, the supra-mundane bodies (the ten Dhamma Bodies) and their Dhamma Spheres are permanent, happy and self. These are not conventional self but are ‘self by liberation’ or ‘self by *vimutti*’.⁸⁹ Only *dhammakāya arahatta* is totally *vimutti*, all the *dhammakāya* below this are not totally *vimutti*.⁹⁰ In support of his teaching, Luang Pho Wat Paknam sums up the passage from D III 77., ‘The self is one’s refuge. The self is an island of refuge, nothing else. Dhamma is an island of refuge, nothing else. There should be nothing else to depend on, except this self’.⁹¹

Furthermore, in the sermon called ‘Buddhagūṇa, Dhammagūṇa, Saṅghagūṇa’ (‘The Virtue of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the

⁸⁹ *Biography and Works*, p. 234.

⁹⁰ *Biography and Works*, p. 234.

⁹¹ *Biography and Works*, p. 233.

Saṅgha') in 1955,⁹² Luang Pho Wat Paknam states that the reason why the Buddha emphasized impermanence, suffering and not-self is because the Buddha wanted his followers to search for that which is permanent, happy and self.⁹³ Then he gives a simile that it is like two people standing next to each other, one short, one tall and we are acquainted with the tall one.⁹⁴ When we are asked whether we know those two people or not, we are able to answer that we know the tall one.⁹⁵ If someone overheard this, they would understand that the person that we are not acquainted with is the one who is shorter.⁹⁶ We do not have to tell them that we do not know the shorter one.⁹⁷ In the same way, impermanence points to permanence, suffering points to happiness and not-self points to self.⁹⁸

Using similar arguments as the Saṅgharāja, Luang Pho Wat Paknam incorporates the idea that *nibbāna* is self into the *thammakai* meditation system. He develops this idea further by explaining that not only is *nibbāna* self, but it is also the *dhammakāya*, which appears like a translucent Buddha statue. When the Buddhas and the *arahants* die, their Dhamma bodies dwell in a place outside the mundane realms called *āyatana nibbāna*. The *dhammakāya* that the meditator sees in his/her practice, is *nibbāna*, which the meditator temporarily reaches. Luang Pho Wat Paknam directs his followers to contemplate the *dhammakāya* to see that all the *dhammakāya* have opposite characteristics to the lower worldly bodies as the development of insight.

The meditation technique of Luang Pho Wat Paknam became popular and his teaching received much praise, even more so when

⁹² *Biography and Works*, pp. 29-85.

⁹³ *Biography and Works*, p. 45.

⁹⁴ *Biography and Works*, p. 45.

⁹⁵ *Biography and Works*, p. 45.

⁹⁶ *Biography and Works*, p. 45.

⁹⁷ *Biography and Works*, p. 45.

⁹⁸ *Biography and Works*, pp. 45-46.

he became widely known from the stories of his helping the local people during the time of war and the miracles surrounding his amulets. At the same time many criticisms were directed at the *thammakai* meditation system and his teaching that *nibbāna* is *attā*.⁹⁹

1.2.4 P.A. Payutto

At the end of Luang Pho Wat Paknam's life, Thailand saw the rise of another young monk scholar. Today his fame equals that of Buddhādāsa's and his influence on academic Buddhism in Thailand is arguably unrivalled in its history. Phrom Phromkhunaphon, known by the name of P.A. Payutto, was born in 1938 in Suphan Buri province.¹⁰⁰ He was ordained as a novice in 1952. In 1953, he moved to Bangkok to further his scriptural studies. Payutto was an outstanding student. In 1963, he graduated with a first class honours degree in Buddhism from the Mahachulalongkorn University, since then, he has been awarded fifteen honorary doctorates by both Thai and foreign institutions. Many books, covering all areas of Buddhism, have been published under his name. Today Payutto has written over 300 published books, the most famous being the massive and encyclopaedic พุทธธรรม [Buddhadhamma]. In 1994 he received the UNESCO Prize for Peace Education. In the same year, he moved to become the abbot of Wat Yanavesakawan, Nakhon Pathom province, his present monastery. In 2004, he was given the clerical title of Phra Phromkhunaphon. His former titles were Phra Siwisutthimoli, Phra Thepwethi, Phra Rājavaramunī and Phra Dhammapīṭaka.

⁹⁹ Prawet Wasi, *Suanmok Thammakai Santi Asok* (Bangkok: Folk Doctor, 1988), p. 33.

¹⁰⁰ Biographical information taken from: *Chiwaprawat Phra Thampidok (Biography of Phra Dhammapīṭaka)*, Mahachulalongkonratwitthayalai University, <<http://www.mcu.ac.th/dhamapitaka/htmlfile/bio.html>> [accessed 15 December 2004]; and also a more updated information was provided by Dr. Martin Seeger, my external examiner.

Payutto wrote นีพพาน-อนัตตา (*Nipphan-Anatta*) [*Nibbāna-Anattā*]¹⁰¹ in 1994 as a response to some of the comments published in two magazines, one called สมาธิ (*Samadhi*), the other called ธรรมกาย (*Thammakai*), of which have ceased publication, and also as a reply to a paper, which had been sent directly to him. All of the important references and arguments *Nipphan-Anatta* are later cited and re-stated in the book, which is the main reference of the next chapter, called กรณีธรรมกาย (*Korani Thammakai*) [*The Dhammakāya Case*].¹⁰² To sum up, Payutto argues that looking at the references from the Tipiṭaka and the Aṭṭhakathā, there appears to be no reference in the scripture stating that *nibbāna* is *attā*, but there appear to be many references in the scriptures stating clearly that *nibbāna* is *anattā*. As these references will be cited in the next chapter, I shall not mention them here. However, the appendix, which covers some minor points, is worth mentioning. Payutto refutes the interpretation of the story of the Buddha and the Bhaddavaggīyas. The Buddha said to them that instead of looking for that woman, they should look for themselves. The proponents of the *attā* perspective argue that the Buddha was talking about *nibbāna* when he told the Bhaddavaggīyas to look for themselves. Payutto states that there is no special meaning behind the word ‘self’ in this saying. The Tipiṭaka does not refer to this story again and there is no Aṭṭhakathā commentary on this. What the Buddha means is that the Bhaddavaggīya should stop worrying about external things and should worry about solving their own problems.¹⁰³ The Buddha was directing them to turn their attention to themselves. Self in this statement only means self in the conventional sense. The final point that Payutto makes in this book is that it is not correct to think that when *nibbāna* is *anattā*, *nibbāna*

¹⁰¹ Phra Dhammapiṭaka (P.A. Payutto), นีพพาน-อนัตตา (*Nipphan-Anatta*) [*Nibbāna-Anattā*] (Bangkok: Buddhadhamma, 1994).

¹⁰² Phra Dhammapiṭaka (P.A. Payutto), กรณีธรรมกาย (*Korani Thammakai*) [*The Dhammakāya Case*] (Bangkok: Buddhadhamma, 1999).

¹⁰³ Phra Dhammapiṭaka, *Nipphan-Anatta*, p. 112.

becomes extinction as the proponents of the *attā* perspective think. He emphasizes that one must understand the difference between things that exist and *attā*. Conditioned *dhammas* and the unconditioned *dhamma* truly exist, but *attā* only exists when there is clinging.¹⁰⁴ In the ultimate sense, there are only these two kinds of *dhamma*, there is no *attā*; for example, ‘animal’, ‘person’, ‘man’, ‘woman’, ‘we’, ‘you’, etc.¹⁰⁵ The Buddha says that there are two extreme views that are false. One view states that behind all things there is a true *attā* that is permanent and eternal.¹⁰⁶ This view is eternalism. The other wrong view states that nothing is real, things only exist as form that we are able to see and will all perish into nothingness.¹⁰⁷ This view is annihilationism. The Buddha teaches the middle way between these two extremes, that things are neither non-existent nor existent according to our clinging. *Nibbāna* truly exists, but it is neither according to anyone’s power, control nor clinging.¹⁰⁸

1.2.5 Phra Rajyanvisith

After Luang Phor Wat Paknam’s death, his leading students took over the task of teaching *thammakai* meditation. Two of these leading students were Phra Ratchaphromathen (พระราชพรหมเถร), the current deputy abbot of Wat Paknam, and Upāsikā Chan Khon Nokyung (จันทร์ ขนนกยูง), a leading practitioner ‘mae chee’.¹⁰⁹ One of Phra Ratchaphromathen’s pupils was layman called Sermchai Polpattanaritdhi. He later became the abbot of one of Wat Pak Nam’s branch monasteries, Wat Luang Por Sodh Dhammakayaram and was

¹⁰⁴ Phra Dhammapīṭaka, *Nipphan-Anatta*, p. 120.

¹⁰⁵ Phra Dhammapīṭaka, *Nipphan-Anatta*, p. 120.

¹⁰⁶ Phra Dhammapīṭaka, *Nipphan-Anatta*, p. 121.

¹⁰⁷ Phra Dhammapīṭaka, *Nipphan-Anatta*, p. 121.

¹⁰⁸ Phra Dhammapīṭaka, *Nipphan-Anatta*, p. 121.

¹⁰⁹ A female renunciant who usually wears white and follows the ten precepts, the option of fully ordained nun has not been available in the Theravāda lineage for over 1000 years.

given the clerical name of Phra Rajyanvisith (พระราชญาณวิสิฐ).¹¹⁰ Today he is one of the leading proponents of the *nibbāna-attā* perspective. Phra Rajyanvisith was born in 1929 in Buriram province. He graduated with a Master's degree in Public Administration from Thammasat University and worked as a research specialist in the research office of the United States Information Service. Phra Rajyanvisith practised *thammakai* meditation under the direction of Wat Pak Nam's current deputy-abbot, Phra Ratchaphromathen, since he was a layman and started teaching meditation in 1984. He was ordained three years before reaching retirement age at Wat Paknam in 1984. In 1992, he founded Wat Luang Por Sodh Dhamma-kayaram in Ratchaburi province and became its abbot. In 2004, he was given the clerical title of Phra Rajyanvisith, his former title was Phra Phawanawisutthikhun (พระภาวนาวิสุทธิคุณ).

In อริยสัจ ๔ (*Ariyasat Si*) [*The Four Noble Truths*],¹¹¹ published in 1995, Phra Rajyanvisith argues that the references which state that *nibbāna* is *anattā* do not refer to the *attā* in the ultimate (*paramattha*), but only *attā* in the conventional (*sammuti*) sense.¹¹² Phra Rajyanvisith states that in examining these references from the point of view of practice, one is able to look at all the references in a different light. For although there is no reference in the scriptures stating that *nibbāna* is *attā*, there are many references, which point the reader to *attā* in the *paramattha*.¹¹³ This *attā* in the *paramattha* is *nibbāna*. Importantly, there are references in the scriptures where state clearly that impermanence, suffering and not self are insepa-

¹¹⁰ Biographical information taken from: *Venerable Phra Rajyanvisith: Meditation Master and Buddhist Scholar*, Dhammakaya Buddhist Meditation Institute (Wat Luang Por Sodh Dhammakayaram), <http://www.concentration.org/phra_rajyanvisith.htm> [accessed 15 December 2004]. The romanized spelling of the monastery's name is given in its website. Note that the spelling according to the Royal Institute for this would be Wat Luang Pho Sot Thamkayaram.

¹¹¹ Phra Phawanawisutthikhun (Sermchai Jayamangalo), อริยสัจ ๔ (*Ariyasat Si*) [*The Four Noble Truths*] (Bangkok: Dhammakaya Buddhist Meditation Foundation, 1995).

¹¹² Phra Phawanawisutthikhun, pp. 127 - 134.

¹¹³ For example, see Phra Phawanawisutthikhun, pp. 109 - 119 and p. 156.

rable characteristics, therefore, anything which is *anattā* is also impermanent and suffering.¹¹⁴ *Nibbāna* cannot be *anattā*. Phra Rajyanvisith has published over thirty books and 200 articles. As we shall see, the arguments raised by Rajyanvisith bear many of similarities to the arguments in the book, หลักพิจารณาพระนิพพานธาตุตามแนวพระพุทธดำรัสและอรรถกถา (*Lak Phicharana Phra Nipphan That Tam Naeo Phra Phut Damrat Lae Atthakatha*) [*The Principle of Examination of Nibbāna-dhātu according to the Words of the Buddha and the Aṭṭhakathā*]¹¹⁵ by Phuttha-thamprathip, which is the subject of Chapter Three of this thesis.

1.3 THE CAUSE OF THE DEBATE

The other leading student of Luang Pho Wat Paknam, Upāsikā Chan Khon Nokyung, was a mae chee who could not read and write. She was the founder of the Dhammakāya Foundation. In 1970, to accommodate the increasing number of her meditation students, Upāsikā Chan and her followers Thammachayo Bhikkhu and Thattachiwo Bhikkhu founded a temple to the north of Bangkok called Wat Phra Thammakai. Thammachayo Bhikkhu (Phra Ratphawanawisut) became its abbot and Thattachiwo Bhikkhu (Phra Phawanaviriyakhun) became its deputy abbot. Wat Phra Thammakai grew rapidly to become one of Thailand's biggest temples. In 1985, the original 80-acre land expanded to 1000 acres. The temple community grew to 1500 people, both monks and laity. In 1990, Wat Phra Thammakai under its supporting organization, the Dhammakāya Foundation, was the host of an international conference, 'Buddhism into the Year 2000'. As its founder, Chan, was one of the leading disciples of Luang Pho Wat Paknam, Dhammakāya Foundation teaches *thammakai* medita-

¹¹⁴ For example, see Phra Phawanawisutthikhun, p. 34.

¹¹⁵ Phutthathamprathip, หลักพิจารณาพระนิพพานธาตุ ตามแนวพระพุทธดำรัสและอรรถกถา (*Lak Phicharana Phra Nipphan That Tam Naeo Phra Phut Damrat Lae Atthakatha*) [*The Principle of Examination of Nibbāna-dhātu according to the Words of the Buddha and the Aṭṭhakathā*] (Unknown: Unknown, Unknown).

tion method. It also inherited the teachings of Luang Pho Wat Paknam that *nibbāna* is *attā* and also the idea of *āyatana nibbāna*.

In January 1999, as a response to the resurgence of the *nibbāna: attā or anattā* debate, Phra Somchai Thanwuttho of Wat Phra Thammakai issued a book called นีพพานเป็นอัตตาหรืออนัตตา (*Nipphan Pen Atta Rue Anatta*) [*Is Nibbāna Attā or Anattā?*]¹¹⁶, which aims to provide an overview of the *attā* perspective giving reference to the Tipiṭaka and also giving the perspectives of western scholars. It also cites extensively the sermon by the twelfth Saṅgharāja. That book was, then, printed in a daily newspaper. At the same time, serious concerns about Wat Phra Thammakai's growing influence were expressed by a number of people. These people raised questions about Wat Phra Thammakai's financial dealings, its construction of big religious sites, its reason given to people to make donations, and the miracles, which apparently occurred at the temple. Naturally, under such focus, the issue of its teaching that *nibbāna* is *attā* was also raised among Buddhologists. It is this book, *Is Nibbāna attā or anattā?*, (in fact, the newspaper article version of it), which caused Payutto to published *Dhammakāya Case*, compiling references and arguments for the *anattā* perspective. The book also aims to provide the Tipiṭaka's point of view on other questions which were raised about Wat Phra Thammakai. The arguments concerning *nibbāna* in this book are the subject of the next chapter.

¹¹⁶ Phra Somchai Thanwuttho, นีพพานเป็นอัตตาหรืออนัตตา (*Nipphan Pen Atta Rue Anatta*) [*Is Nibbāna Attā or Anattā?*] (Bangkok: Pradiput Publishing, 1999).

II

NIBBĀNA IS ANATTĀ

PAYUTTO'S DHAMMAKĀYA CASE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

กรณีธรรมกาย (*Korani Thammakai*) [Dhammakāya Case] was first published in April 1999. In the year of its first publication, it went through many editions. In its sixteenth edition it was expanded. In its twenty-third edition, which was published in June 1999, its contents were added to and re-arranged. I shall refer to the June 1999 edition.¹¹⁷ The book is divided into three main parts:

1. Introduction
2. Part 1: *anattā-dhammakāya, āyatananibbāna*
3. Part 2: merits and perfections will rescue Thailand.

The book is altogether 405 pages long. The introduction runs from pages 1 to 94, the first part from pages 95 to 286, the second part from 287 to 405. It is written in Thai apart from the appendixes, which were presumably taken from tapes as they appear in the forms of questions and answers (one being a conversation with the press).

¹¹⁷ Phra Dhammapīṭaka (P.A. Payutto), กรณีธรรมกาย (*Korani Thammakai*) [*The Dhammakāya Case*], 23rd edn (Bangkok: Buddhaddhamma, 1999). For the rest of this chapter, the reference that is without an author or title shall refer to this book.

The style of the written language is informal and not especially academic, but in places the book refers extensively to Pāli terms and quotes references from the scriptures.

This chapter of the thesis is mostly concerned with Part 1, ‘*Anattā-dhammakāya-āyatananibbāna*’, which aims at refuting the Dhammakāya Foundation’s teaching (mostly Thanwuttho’s *Is Nibbāna Attā or Anattā?*) on *nibbāna* as *attā* and its interpretation of the terms *Dhammakāya* and *āyatana-nibbāna*. However, I will focus on parts of the introduction, which are relevant to this thesis. The introduction consists of four sections.

1. ‘The root of the matter’, in which Payutto explains what caused him to write this book, criticising Dhammakāya for falsely-stating the *Dhammavinaya* on its teaching of *nibbāna dhammakāya* and *āyatananibbāna*.

2. ‘Knowing the Tipiṭaka’, in which Payutto states the importance of the Pāli Tipiṭaka to Theravāda Buddhism and to Buddhism in general and urges Buddhists to study and be faithful to the Tipiṭaka in order to maintain the original teaching of the Buddha for future generations.

3. ‘Miscellaneous 1’ being an addition to ‘Knowing the Tipiṭaka’, is written to clarify the misunderstandings people have with regard to the Tipiṭaka and the study of the Tipiṭaka.

4. ‘Miscellaneous 2: citing western scholars’, in which Payutto attacks ‘Dhammakāya Foundation article’, namely, Thanwuttho’s work for over-praising the Pāli Text Society’s version of the Tipiṭaka and also citing the *attā* perspectives of certain western scholars.

1. ‘The root of the matter’. Payutto explains that on January 11, 1999, the members of the press came to ask him about the problems of Wat Phra Thammakai (Dhammakāya Foundation) and one of them gave him a book which claims to review confidential details about the Dhammakāya Foundation. Payutto selected the information on *nibbāna* and *dhammakāya*. On January 13, 1999, Payutto read an article that was printed in a daily newspaper. This article is translated as ‘Direct from Wat Phra Thammakai. Is *Nibbāna Attā* or *Anattā*?’ by Phra Somchai Thanwuttho. It is the newspaper article version of Thanwuttho’s *Is Nibbāna Attā or Anattā?* A few days later there was a statement in a newspaper saying ‘The matter of *nibbāna* is of many opinions’. This statement caused Payutto to react in writing this book. Payutto states that the objective of this book is to maintain and keep Buddhism as pure and complete as possible, so that the people in this generation and the next will gain real benefit from it.¹¹⁸

Payutto claims that Wat Phra Thammakai is guilty of distorting *dhamma-vinaya* by teaching and spreading the following ideas:

- ‘1. *Nibbāna* is *attā*;
2. *Dhammakāya* as a *nimitta* (mental image) and having *dhammakāyas* that are *attā* of many Buddhas gathering in *āyatana-nibbāna*;
3. *Āyatananibbāna* in its own words as a land where one can visit the Buddha in *samādhi*, even having a ritual of giving food to the Buddha in *āyatananibbāna*.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ p. 3.

¹¹⁹ p. 11.

2. ‘Knowing the Tipiṭaka’. Payutto criticises those who cites words of *theras* (senior monk) and *mahātheras* (great senior monks), which are contradictory to the Buddha’s teaching. Although Payutto does not refer to any particular *thera*, in explicitly directing this part of the book mostly against Than-wuttho’s article, which attached the sermon of the Saṅgharāja (Phae Tissadevo) at the back of it, it is most likely that he had the Saṅgharāja’s sermon in mind when he wrote this.

Payutto explains that in order to decide whether something is contradictory to the Buddha’s teaching or not the principle of the Four Great References (Four Mahāpadesa) must be used. This is a list of the hierarchy of possible sources of *dhamma* mentioned in the commentary to be considered when examining the legitimacy of a particular teaching, the first being the highest, the last being the lowest in the hierarchy, the lower sources are to be rejected if they are contradictory to the higher sources:

1. *Sutta* i.e. the Tipiṭaka.
2. *Suttanuloma*, Mahāpadesa (including the Aṭṭhakathā).
3. *Ācariya-vāda*, A hakathā (including ā ikā and Anuṭikā)
4. *Attanomati*, view of a person outside the three above.¹²⁰

In truth, the *Sutta* is irrevocable. It is equal to *saṅgha*’s performance (the assembly of 500 *arahants* who performed the first council) and as when the Buddhas were still dwelling.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Sv II 567; Sp (Se) II 27; Sp-ṭ (Se) III 352.

¹²¹ Sp (Se) I 272.

For when the *Sutta* is contradicted, the Buddha is contradicted.¹²²

Do not hold to it, but be firm on the *attano mati*, meaning, *attano mati* of one's school (Theravāda) is more important than the *Suttas* of other schools.¹²³

It is interesting to note that, as we shall see in the next chapter, the Four Mahāpadesa, with slightly different interpretation, are also used by Phuttha-thamprathip to argue against Payutto.

2.2 PAYUTTO'S CHARACTERISATION OF WESTERN S CHOLARSHIP ON ATTĀ/ANATTĀ

2. '*Citing western scholars*'. It is divided into two sections:

1. 'Is the roman Tipiṭaka of the Pāli Text Society an international version?'

2. 'The perspective of western scholars on *nibbāna attā anattā*'.

The second section 'The perspective of the western scholars on *nibbāna attā-anattā*', the first section of this book, which I will focus on, aims to clarify a statement from the Dhammakāya Foundation claiming that famous scholars in the West think that there is an *attā* in Buddhism.

¹²² Sp-ṭ (Se) II 71.

¹²³ Sp-ṭ (Se) II 71. Payutto explains 'it' to mean *bāhirakasuttas*, which are suttas that have not been included at the third council, along with suttas of the Mahāsaṅghika school (p.37).

Payutto cited Thanwuttho's work and states that it causes an incorrect understanding of western scholars. Payutto mentions a number of western writers by name as arguing that Buddhism teaches a true *attā*: e.g. Mrs Rhys Davids, Miss I.B. Horner, Christmas Humphries and Edward Conze. According to Payutto, these and other western scholars maintain the same position regarding *attā* in two respects: (1) the Buddha never categorically denied an absolute *attā*, (2) on the contrary his teachings imply a true *attā* beyond the five aggregates, which, however, he was reluctant to teach directly lest it be confused with the *atman* of brahminic religion.¹²⁴ For Payutto this represents an incorrect understanding.

He goes on to consider the evolution of the western scholarly perspective on Buddhism by way of three phases. In the first phase, although scholars studied the Tipiṭaka in Pāli, their understanding of its doctrines tended to be influenced by conceptions derived from western, Hindu and Mahāyāna thought, and was therefore confused; some scholars understood *nibbāna* as the extinguishing of the *attā*,¹²⁵ others saw a further *attā* beyond an extinguished conventional *attā*.¹²⁶ In the second phase, although confusion and misconception were still common, western scholarly understanding began to be influenced by the correct understanding of the increasing number of western practitioners of Buddhism who were ordaining as

¹²⁴ 'Mrs Rhys Davis, the President of Pāli Text Society, England, 1922-1942 [Steven Collins, *Selfless Person: Imagery and Thought in Thera-vāda Buddhism* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 7]; Miss I. B. Horner, President of Pāli Text Society, England, 1959-1981, [Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind*, (Curson Press, 1995), p.19]; Christmas Humphrey [Christmas Humphrey, *Buddhism*, (Penguin Books, 1949, p. 88]; Edward Conze [Edward Conze, *Buddhist Thought in India*, (George Allen and Unwin, 1962), p. 39]

¹²⁵ Encyclopaedia Britannica (Chicago, 1988), s.v. "Religious Experience," vol.26, p.633: 'The approaches to the divine or sacred are various rather than uniform ... , it moves toward the ultimate goal: the annihilation of the self, ... , Nirvāṇa (the state of bliss) in Buddhism'

¹²⁶ Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and I. B. Horner, *The Living Thought of Gotama the Buddha* (London: Cassel & Co., Ltd., 1984).

Theravādin Buddhist monks.¹²⁷ In the final phase, a new generation of western scholars managed to reach a more precise and accurate understanding of the doctrines of the Pāli Tipiṭaka.¹²⁸

Before the arguments of *Dhammakāya Case* are overviewed, it is important to provide Payutto's overall understanding of the word *anattā* and *nibbāna*. I have had the privilege of meeting the venerable Suriyo, a Theravāda Buddhist monk who lives in a monastery in Devon. He is currently translating the most famous and encyclopaedic work of Payutto: ဗုဒ္ဓဓမ္မ (Buddha-dhamma). These are extracts and summary of his unpublished translation of *Buddhadhamma* concerning *anattā* and *nibbāna*.

Anattā or 'not-self,' 'selfless,' or 'nonself' is the negation of the word *attā*, which refers to 'an eternal self or substance, which is the true essence or core of any particular thing, residing or dwelling permanently in an object'; an 'owner and controller, the essential recipient of experience and agent of action'; and 'that which lies behind all *dhammas*, including all life, able to direct things in conformity with its needs and desires'.¹²⁹ Moreover, *anattā* is also the negation of the higher 'Self' or 'Spirit', which 'lies behind all worldly *dhammas*, reigning over the souls or abiding substance of all living

¹²⁷ Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (New York: Grove Press, 1974); Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary* (Colombo: Frewin & Co., Ltd. 1972), p. 13: 'While in the case of the first two Characteristics it is stated that "all formations" (*sabbe sankhārā*) are impermanent and subject to suffering, the corresponding text for the third Characteristic states that "all things are not-self" (*sabbe dhammā anattā*; M. 35, Dh. 279). This is for emphasizing that the false view of an abiding self or substance is neither applicable to any "formation", or conditioned *dhammas*, nor to Nibbāna, the Unconditioned Element (*asankhatā dhātu*).'

¹²⁸ Richard F. Gombrich, *Theravāda Buddhism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1994), p. 63: 'Endless misunderstanding has been caused by Western writers, who have assumed that Nibbana is the blowing out of the personal soul ... there is no soul or self as a separate entity, for such terms as soul, self, individual etc., are mere conventional terms ... there can be no question of getting rid of a soul because one has never had one.'

Other examples of some modern (western) scholars questioning the "mainstream" understanding of *anattā* in Buddhist thought are: George Grim, *The Doctrine of the Buddha*, trans. by Bhikkhu Silacara, 2nd edn (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1958), and Joaquin Pérez-Remón, *Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism* (The Hague: Mouton, 1980). See Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind: Personality, Consciousness and Nirvana in Early Buddhism* (London: Routledge Curson, 2004), pp. 17-21.

¹²⁹ Phra Dhammapiṭaka (P.A. Payutto), ဗုဒ္ဓဓမ္မ (*Buddhadhamma*) trans. by Suriyo Bhikkhu, rev. edn. (Unpublished translation), chapter 3, pp. 29-30.

beings and inanimate objects'. This Self 'creates and governs all things'. This corresponds to the ideas of, for example, Brahma or *Paramātmān* in Hinduism.¹³⁰ For Payutto *attā* does not exist in any levels of existence and is merely 'an idea stemming from the misapprehension by unenlightened human beings, who do not perceive the nature of the world as it truly is'.¹³¹

Payutto's understanding of *nibbāna* as *anattā*, like Buddha-dāsa's, is based on the saying *sabbe dhammā anattā*.¹³²

1. *Sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā:*

All conditioned *dhammas* are impermanent

2. *Sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā:*

All conditioned *dhammas* are subject to pressure.

3. *Sabbe dhammā anattā:*

All things are nonself.¹³³

It is explained that only conditioned *dhammas* are impermanent and *dukkha*, but something exists apart from conditioned *dhammas*, which is neither impermanent nor subject to pressure.¹³⁴ The word *dhammā* refers to 'all things'.¹³⁵ In this saying, the Buddha used the term *dhamma* in the broadest sense, denoting every kind of condition or state, without exception.¹³⁶ Therefore *dhammā* embraces both conditioned *dhammas* and the Unconditioned.¹³⁷

¹³⁰ Payutto, *Buddhadhamma*, p. 30.

¹³¹ Payutto, *Buddhadhamma*, p. 30.

¹³² S III 132.

¹³³ Payutto, *Buddhadhamma*, p. 28.

¹³⁴ Payutto, *Buddhadhamma*, p. 6.

¹³⁵ Payutto, *Buddhadhamma*, p. 6.

¹³⁶ Payutto, *Buddhadhamma*, p. 6.

¹³⁷ Payutto, *Buddhadhamma*, p. 6.

The following paragraph is an important paragraph for, as we shall see, it is several times attacked by Phutthathamprathip as distorting the words of the Buddha in S III 22 which lays down the principle of the inseparability of the three characteristics.

Although that which is impermanent is *dukkha*, and that which is *dukkha* is nonself, the converse is not always true, that whatever is nonself must be impermanent and *dukkha*. All conditioned *dhammas* (*saṅkhāras*) are impermanent, subject to pressure, and selfless, yet all things (*dhamma*), both conditioned things and the Unconditioned (*visaṅkhāras*), although selfless, need not always be impermanent and *dukkha*; something exists that is permanent and free of *dukkha*. This means that the Unconditioned (Nirvana), although selfless, is beyond both impermanence and *dukkha*.¹³⁸

2.3 PAYUTTO ON ATTĀ / ANATTĀ

2.3.1 General

The first part of the *Dhammakāya Case*, which is translated as ‘*anattā-dhammakāya-āyatananibbāna*’, is divided into three main chapters:

1. ‘*Nibbāna is anattā*’ (pp. 95-174)
2. ‘*Dhammakāya, a high but not big matter*’ (pp. 175-224)

¹³⁸ Payutto, *Buddhadhamma*, p. 46.

3. ‘*Āyatananibbāna* is the extinguishing of *āyatana*’ (pp. 225-241). The first chapter, ‘*Nibbāna is anattā*’,¹³⁹ is the main focus of this chapter of the thesis.

‘*Nibbāna is anattā*’ is an important chapter, which aims at directly refuting what he calls the ‘Dhammakāya Foundation article’ (Thanwuttho’s นิตฺพพานเป็นอิตฺตาทหรืออิตฺตาท [Is *Nibbāna Attā* or *Anattā*?]), which claims that *nibbāna* is *attā* by responding that according to the Tipiṭaka and its commentaries, *nibbāna is anattā*. In this chapter, Payutto extensively quotes from the Than-wuttho article and from the Tipiṭaka and the Aṭṭhakathās. The chapter’s importance is evident when, in August 1999, five months after the first edition of กรณีธรรมกาย [Dhammakāya Case], Buddhaddhamma Foundation, the main publisher of Payutto’s works, took this chapter and re-printed it as a book titled นิตฺพพาน-อิตฺตาท [Nibbāna-Anattā], a second book by Payutto on *nibbāna-anattā*.

From titles of the chapter’s sub-headings, one is able to see the overall structure and arguments of this chapter. I have translated them as follows.

1. ‘*Nibbāna* is not a metaphysical problem.’
2. ‘Not using the clear source of information, but speculating with those who are still confused.’
3. ‘The Buddha has absolutely stated that schools of *attā* are not the teaching of the *sammāsambuddha*.’
4. ‘In truth, there is never an *attā* to debate on whether or not *nibbāna* is *attā*.’

¹³⁹ pp. 175-224.

5. ‘The ordinary person clings to *attā*. Brahmins developed *attā* to become even more splendid. The Buddha teaches to stop clinging to *attā* and see *dhamma*.’

6. ‘The ordinary person, having lost the self that they used to cling to, struggles to find another *attā* to cling to once more.’

7. ‘The Buddha states that *attā* ends at the five aggregates. *Nibbāna* is beyond the five aggregates, so there is no more *attā* to talk about.’

8. ‘Even thinking beyond the five aggregates, there is still nothing that the *ariya* perceives as *attā*.’

9. ‘Clinging to anything as *attā* means not yet knowing *nibbāna*.’

10. ‘The *arahant* does not have ‘*maññanā*’ to see *nibbāna* as *attā*.’

11. ‘Clinging to *attā* means not knowing *nibbāna*. When reaching *nibbāna*, *attā* is abandoned.’

12. ‘Tīpiṭaka and the Aṭṭhakathā state that *nibbāna* is *anattā*.’

13. ‘Trying to interpret *nibbāna* to be *attā*.’

14. ‘Using logic incorrectly to convey that *nibbāna* is *attā*.’

15. ‘Misunderstanding the statement as evidence supporting that *nibbāna* is *attā*.’

16. ‘When lacking in evidence to support, trying to cause confusion.’

17. ‘When lacking in evidence and not able to interpret it, it refers to results of practice.’

18. ‘By not thinking of the *dhammavinaya*, it struggles to avoid the truth.’

19. ‘Buddhism is the religion of the Buddha, so one must take the teaching of the Buddha to be the standard.’

20. ‘In order to preserve Buddhism, Buddhists must have trust-able qualities.’

21. ‘Faithfulness to the principle of Buddhism and loving-kindness to the people is the heart of the preservation of the *trisikkhā* system for civil society.’

22. ‘Having personal opinion is no harm, but do not offend the *dhamma-vinaya*.’

23. ‘Talking about this and that, be careful not to get confused by the word *anattā*.’

24. ‘Talking about this and that, be careful not to loose the point.’

2.3.2 Sections 1-6

The chapter opens with first sub-heading, ‘*Nibbāna* is not a metaphysical problem’. Having stated the importance of the Tipiṭaka, Payutto moves on to refute the comment that ‘Dhammakāya Foundation article’ makes that *nibbāna* is a metaphysical matter or matter that is *acinteyya* (should not to be thought) and can be interpreted in many ways. Payutto argues that *nibbāna* is neither a metaphysical nor an *acinteyya* matter.¹⁴⁰ The Buddha does not answer and clarify *acinteyya* questions, but for questions about *nibbāna* it is the opposite of these questions.¹⁴¹ Stating thus Payutto quotes the story of Mālunkayaputta.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ p. 95.

¹⁴¹ p. 96

¹⁴² M I 430

The second sub-heading, Payutto quotes Thanwuttho and then corrects him with his own words.

The *attā* and *anattā* matter has caused many arguments since the time of the Buddha and throughout the history of Buddhism. Even today, scholars of Buddhist studies both from the west, for example, Europe and the US, and from the east, for example, Japan, China, Korea, debate much on the matter, raising a variety of arguments.¹⁴³

The *attā* matter has caused much clinging from before the time of the Buddha especially by schools of Brahmanic religion, and after the time of the Buddha Hinduism developed and affirmed this idea as seen in the *Brahmanātman* or *Paramātman-jīvāt-man* principle. However, in Buddhism, there is clear attitude of non-acceptance of any aspect of the *attā* theories, that is, there is an extremely clear tendency that Buddhism does not accept *attā* in the ultimate (*paramattha*). Therefore, one must be careful not to let the ideas of outside schools and pre-Buddhist schools that have been refuted by the Buddha to intrude [into the Buddhism].¹⁴⁴

Payutto goes on to say that in the history of Buddhism monks have had to guard the Dhamma against views of *attā* both from inside and outside of Buddhism as was evident in the Third Buddhist

¹⁴³ Thanwuttho, p. 17.

¹⁴⁴ p. 100.

Rehearsal at the time of king Asoka when a monk, Moggalliputtatissa, led the refutation of views of heretics resulting in a split of the sangha into 18 different schools. Payutto then quotes the Theravāda account of the event in the *Kathāvatthu* of the *Abhidhamma Piaka* where the Puggalavādins are refuted. The importance of refuting views of *attā* is evident, states Payutto, as the *Puggalakathā* appears first in the *Kathāvatthu*.

The word *puggala* in the *Puggalakathā* is the synonym for all words regarding the holding of *attā* i.e. in the ordinary speech, namely, a being, person, self, we, they etc.¹⁴⁵

In the Pāli, the word person is namely *attā*, a being, soul.¹⁴⁶

Anattā means without *attā*, without soul, without person.¹⁴⁷

Puggalavādins as understood by Payutto wrongly held that *puggala* or *attā* or being or soul exists in the ultimate (*paramattha*). These people are:

Who are Puggalavādins? With the religion [i.e. Buddhism], namely, Vajjiput-takas and Sammitiyas; outside the religion [i.e. outside of Buddhism], many heterodox teachers.¹⁴⁸

The Puggalavādins are *sassatavādins* who hold the false view of eternalism.

¹⁴⁵ p. 102.

¹⁴⁶ *tattha puggalo ti attā satto jīvo* (Kv-a 8).

¹⁴⁷ *anattā ti attanā jīvena puggalena rahito* (Kv-a 34).

¹⁴⁸ *ke pana puggalavādino ti? sāsane vajjiputtakā c' eva samitiyā ca bahiddhā ca bahū aññatiitthiyā* (Kv-a 8).

Sakavādī: The Buddha has stated “Seniya, three types of religious leaders appear in the world...etc...The three types of religious leaders are:

Religious leaders who decree *attā* in the truth and in the real, in the present and in the future, these are called “*sassatavāda*” (those who hold falsely to permanence).

Religious leaders who decree *attā* in the truth and in the real, only in the present, but do not decree it in the future, these are called “*ucchedavāda*” (one who holds falsely to annihilation).

Religious leaders who do not decree *attā* in the truth or in the real, both in the present and in the future, these are called “*sammāsambuddha*”.¹⁴⁹

The passage ‘decree *attā* in the truth and in the real’ means (religious leaders who are *sassatavādins*) decree in the truth and the stable, that there is a state that is *attā* which is permanent (*nicca*), stable (*dhuva*), and perpetual (*sassata*).¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ *tayome seniya satthāro santo saṃvijjamānā lokasmiṃ ... tatra seniya yvāyaṃ satthā diṭṭhe c’ eva dhamme attānaṃ saccato thetato paññāpeti abhisamparāyaṇ ca attānaṃ saccato thetato paññāpeti ayaṃ vuccati seniya satthā sassatavādo tatra seniya yvāyaṃ satthā diṭṭhe’ va hi kho dhamme attānaṃ saccato thetato paññāpeti no ca kho abhisamparāyaṃ attānaṃ saccato thetato paññāpeti ayaṃ vuccati seniya satthā ucchedavādo tatra seniya yvāyaṃ satthā diṭṭhe c’ eva dhamme attānaṃ saccato thetato na paññāpeti abhisamparāyaṇ ca attānaṃ saccato thetato na paññāpeti ayaṃ vuccati seniya satthā sammāsambuddho* (Kv 68; Pug 38).

¹⁵⁰ *attānaṃ saccato thetato paññāpeti ti “attā nāmeko atthi nicco dhuvo sassato” ti bhūtato thirato paññāpeti* (Ppk-a (Se) 83).

Payutto argues that it is without doubt that Therāvada Buddhism does not hold the view of *attā* in the ultimate sense contrary to what Thanwuttho's article says; it is a matter, which has already been dealt with by the early saṅgha. He goes on to say that as *attā* is a term used only in the conventional sense to refer to the five aggregates, so one would only find in Pāli, references to *attā* used in the conventional sense.¹⁵¹

The previous sentence, as we shall see in the next chapter, is a claim, which Phutthathamprathip devotes many pages of their book refuting. Phuttha-thamprathip argues that *attā* in the ultimate is clearly stated in the *Anattalak-khaṇa Sutta* (Vin I 13) and the *Attadīpa Sutta* (D III 77) and supported by statements in the commentary.

In the fourth section Payutto uses the main argument mentioned above in *Buddhadhamma*, the same arguments used by Buddhadāsa and common to all advocators of the *anatta* perspective: the two kinds of *dhammas*, namely, *saṅ khatadhammas* and *asaṅkhata-dhamma* or *nibbāna* both being without *attā*. He further states that *attā* is a picture that we create in our minds and cling to; that *attā* only exists within the clinging or views, of which clinging is called *attādiṭṭhi*.¹⁵² *Attādiṭṭhi* blocks us from seeing the two *dhammas* as they really are and causes us suffering.¹⁵³ But when *attādiṭṭhi* is gone, we will see both *dhammas* according the way they are.¹⁵⁴ Therefore *nibbāna* is only seen when *attādiṭṭhi* has been abandoned.¹⁵⁵ Thus those who reach *nibbāna* do not see *attā*, but see the two *dhammas*.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵¹ pp. 105-6.

¹⁵² p. 107.

¹⁵³ p. 107.

¹⁵⁴ p. 108.

¹⁵⁵ p. 108.

¹⁵⁶ p. 108.

From the overall picture of Payutto's thought, it is easily seen that it bears similarities to that of Buddhādāsa's. Buddhādāsa, as mentioned above, advocates the ideas of two *dhammas*: that which is conditioned (*saṅkhatadhamma*) and that which is unconditioned (*asaṅkhata-dhamma*), the two kinds of *dhammas* are neither self nor have their own selves and only exist as *dhammas*; and also the idea that the doctrine of *anattā* as a doctrine that is unique to Buddhism, that the Buddha refuted the doctrines of *ātman* of other schools prevalent at the time of the Buddha. Moreover, when Payutto goes on to say that when clinging and the picture of *attā* are gone the mind becomes *vimariyā-digata* that is wide, without boundary and happy, which are qualities within and cannot be found elsewhere¹⁵⁷, and that in the part on *āyatana-nibbāna*, *nibbānāyatana* is interpreted by Payutto as the state of cooling down of *āyatana* and described as the real *nibbānāyatana*, 'here and now', and the *nibbāna* of the Buddha,¹⁵⁸ this somewhat echoes Buddhādāsa's idea of *nibbāna* here and now, which is to be found at the present moment within our minds.

It must also be noted that although Buddhādāsa sees the differences in Brahmanic and Buddhist thinking on *attā*, at the same time he also sees similarities between their ideas and practices, for example, the idea that *ātman* neither arises nor perishes conforming to the idea of *nibbāna*; and that *ātman* exists permanently in every life until released from the worldly *dhammas* in the state of *mokṣa* when all cravings are extinguished, bearing similarities to the state of *nibbāna*.¹⁵⁹ As for Payutto, the similarities seem to be fewer than Buddhādāsa and the differences much more emphasized. Payutto thinks that the differences in the main tenets of both traditions, i.e. *ātman* and *anattā* respectively, have led to the divergence of their

¹⁵⁷ p. 110.

¹⁵⁸ p. 237

¹⁵⁹ Phra Thamkosachan, p. 62.

teachings in two different directions, for example, the Brahmanic emphasis upon rituals performed to the *devas* in order to ‘expand one’s clinging to *attā*’ and the Buddhist emphasis on making merits in order to ‘abandon one’s clinging’ to it.¹⁶⁰

Payutto raises an important argument. *Nibbāna* is a very important *dham-ma* and the final goal in Buddhism, the Buddha having said that the five aggregates as *anattā* and talked about *nibbāna* in many ways, surely if *nibbāna* is *attā*, the Buddha would not leave it out.¹⁶¹ If it is so, he would certainly mention that it is *attā*.¹⁶²

2.3.3 Sections 7-11

From this section to the thirteenth section, Payutto compiles references from the Tipiṭaka and the commentaries, which he claims support that *nibbāna* is *anattā*. The purpose of this section, as I see it, is that after having provided an understanding of *nibbāna*, this section is to give evidentiary support to the above understanding. For each reference, Payutto provides explanation and comment.

Monks, when what exists, by clinging to what, by adhering to what, does such a view as this arise: ‘This is mine, this I am, this is my *attā*/self’?

Monks, when there is form (*rūpa*), by clinging to form, by adhering to form, such a view as this arises: ‘This is mine, this I am, this is my *attā*/self.’ When there is feeling (*vedanā*) ... perception (*saññā*) ... formations

¹⁶⁰ pp. 110-111.

¹⁶¹ p. 112.

¹⁶² p. 112.

(*sankhāra*) ... consciousness (*viññāṇa*), by clinging to consciousness, by adhering to consciousness, such a view as this arises: ‘This is mine, this I am, this is my *attā*/self.’¹⁶³

He goes on to say that seeing that something is *attā* is seeing that takes the clinging to the five aggregates as self.¹⁶⁴ When we have abandoned ignorance, the clinging to me/mine and we/ours as this or that will be gone. The Buddha also states the cause of the clinging to *attā*.¹⁶⁵

Monks, those ascetics or Brahmins who regard *attā*/self in various ways all regard the five aggregates subject to clinging or a certain one among them. What five?

Here monks, the ordinary person who has not heard the Dhamma regards form as *attā*/self, or *attā*/self as possessing form, or form as in *attā*/self, or *attā*/self as in form. He regards feeling ... perception ... formations ... consciousness (in the same ways).

Thus this way of regarding things and the notion that ‘there is myself/myself is’ that have not vanished in him. As ‘there is myself/myself is’ has not vanished, there takes place a descent of the five faculties, namely, the eye faculty, the ear faculty, the nose faculty, the

¹⁶³ *kismiṃ nu kho bhikkhave sati kiṃ upādāya kiṃ abhinivissa evaṃ diṭṭhi uppajjati etaṃ mama eso ’ham asmi eso me attā ti ... rūpe kho bhikkhave ... vedanāya ... saññāya ... saṅkhāresu ... viññāṇe sati ... rūpaṃ ... vedanaṃ ... saññaṃ ... saṅkhāre ... viññāṇaṃ upādāya ... abhinivissa evaṃ diṭṭhi uppajjati etaṃ mama eso ’ham asmi eso me attā ti* (S III 203-204).

¹⁶⁴ p. 114.

¹⁶⁵ p. 114.

tongue faculty and the body faculty. Monks, there is the *mana* (mind), there are all *dhammas* (objects), there is *avijjā-dhātu* (element of ignorance). When the ordinary person who has not heard the Dhamma is contacted by a feeling born of ignorance-contact, ‘there is myself/myself is’, ‘I am this’, ‘I will be’, ‘I will not be’ ... occur to him.

Monks, the five faculties remain right there, but in regard to them the noble disciple who has heard the Dhamma abandons ignorance and arouses true knowledge. With the fading away of ignorance and the arising of true knowledge, ‘there is myself/myself is’, ‘I am this’, ‘I will be’, ‘I will not be’ ... do not occur to him.¹⁶⁶

When there is *attā*, there is *attaniya* (that belonging to *attā*) and vice versa.¹⁶⁷ But in reality there is neither *attā* nor *attaniya*, the clinging to *attā* that is permanent and eternal is completely the *dhamma* of the fool.¹⁶⁸

Monks, there being *attā*, would there be *attaniya*/what belongs to my *attā*? Yes, Lord.

¹⁶⁶ *ye hi keci bhikkhave samaṇā vā brāhmaṇā vā anekavihiṭṭaṃ attānaṃ samanupassamānā samanupassanti sabbe te pañcupādānakkhandhe samanupassanti etesaṃ vā aññataraṃ. katame pañca. idha bhikkhave assutavā puthujjano ... rūpam attatō samanupassati rūpavantaṃ vā attānaṃ attani vā rūpaṃ rūpasmim vā attānaṃ. vedanaṃ ... saññaṃ ... saṅkhāre ... viññānaṃ (S III 46).*

¹⁶⁷ p. 116.

¹⁶⁸ p. 116.

Monks, there being what belongs to *attā*, would there be my *attā* (the owner of *attaniya*)? Yes, Lord.

Monks, since *attā* and *attaniya* are not apprehended as true and established, then, this standpoint for views, namely, ‘The self and the world are the same; after death I shall be permanent, everlasting, eternal, not subject to change; I shall endure as long as eternity’ – would it not be an utterly and completely foolish teaching?

Lord, what else could it be? It would be an utterly and completely foolish teaching.¹⁶⁹

Payutto asserts that the *ariya* clings to neither the five aggregates nor the twelve *āyatanas*. The external *āyatanas* include *dhammas* (*dhammāyatana*), which include *nibbāna* also.¹⁷⁰

Monks, the *ariya* disciple who heard the Dhamma regards form ... feeling ... perception ... formations ... what is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, encountered, sought, mentally pondered ... And this standpoint for views, namely, ‘The self and the world are the same; after death I shall be permanent, everlasting, eternal, not subject to change; I shall

¹⁶⁹ *attani vā bhikkhave sati attaniyaṃ me ti assā ti. evaṃ bhante. attaniye vā bhikkhave sati attā me ti assā ti. evaṃ bhante. attani ca bhikkhave attaniye ca saccato thetato anupalabbhiyamāne yaṃ p’ idaṃ diṭṭhi ṭhānaṃ so loko so attā so pecca bhavissāmi nicco dhuvo sassato avipariṇāmadhammo sassatisamaṃ that’eva ṭhassāmī ti nanāyaṃ bhikkhave kevalo paripūro bāladhammo ti. kiñ hi no siyā bhante kevalo hi bhante paripūro bāladhammo ti (M I 138).*

¹⁷⁰ p. 118

endure as long as eternity’ – this too he regards thus: ‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’ Since he regards them thus, he is not agitated about what is non-existent.¹⁷¹

Payutto explains that the *ariya* does not see anything without a single exception as *attā*. However, the commentary on this particular passage explains that *dhammāyatana* refers to *dhammas* that can be clung to as self: *sakkā-yapariyāpannaṃ*,¹⁷² which are the five aggregates.¹⁷³ According to Payutto, commentarial passages that explain what is *anattā* as the five aggregates are taken to refer only to a particular context and do not provide the complete understanding. Those passages do not give the whole picture, but provide a limited meaning suitable to certain audiences at a certain time, in a sense, one could say they are, according to Payutto’s understanding, *neyārtha* teaching, which shall be defined as provisional or introductory teaching not entirely accurate from the ultimate point of view. Whereas passages that explain *anattā* to include all things without exception are taken as *neyārtha* teaching. This shall be defined as the final teaching from the ultimate point of view.¹⁷⁴ However, as we shall see, those who advocate the *attā* perspective would not agree with this, but would assert that the passages explaining *anattā* to include all things are *neyārtha* teaching for they do not include the exception to this, which is *nibbāna*. These are very important points to

¹⁷¹ *sutavā ca kho ... ariyasāvako ... rūpaṃ ... vedanaṃ ... saññaṃ ... saṅkhāre ... yamp’ idaṃ diṭṭha suttaṃ mutaṃ viññātaṃ pattaṃ pariyesiṭaṃ anuvicaritaṃ manasā tam pi ... yamp’ idaṃ diṭṭhiṭṭhānaṃ so loko so attā so pecca bhavissāmi nicco dhuvo sassato avipariṇāmadhammo sassatisamaṃ that’ eva ṭhassāmī ti tam pi n’ etaṃ mama n’ eso ’ham asmi na meso attā ti samanupassati so evaṃ samanupassanto asati na paritassatī ti (M I 136).*

¹⁷² Ps (Se) I 40.

¹⁷³ p. 118.

¹⁷⁴ In using these two terms I am only taking their basic definitions and putting them into the context of this debate to aid the reader’s understanding. The implications attached to these terms regarding the cycle of the wheel of *dharma* (*dharmacakra*) when used by Tibetan commentators to assign certain Mahāyāna texts are not implied when these two terms are used in this book.

keep in mind when trying to understand the debate as the assumption of what constitute as *neyārtha* and *neyārtha* teachings between the two perspectives are crucial to the differences in their understanding of *attā*, *anattā* and *nibbāna*.

(Monks) see impermanence in the clinging to the five aggregates. Form, feeling, perception, formations, consciousness are impermanent.

Monks see six outer and inner *āyatana*, all six, as *anattā*/not *attā*. Eye, form, ear, sounds, nose, scents, tongue, tastes, body, tangibles, mind, cognizable object are *anattā*/not *attā*.¹⁷⁵

Payutto then separates the two verses: 1. *upa-dāna* of the five *khandha* is *aniccaṃ* (same as saying *upadāna* of the five *khandha* is suffering); and 2. *āya-tana*, both inside and outside, 6 + 6 = 12, including *dhammāyatana* are *anattā*.¹⁷⁶ He argues that this is similar separating *sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā ... dukkhā ...* and *sabbe dhammā anattā*.¹⁷⁷

Ariya, from stream-enterer upwards, cannot cling to anything as *attā*.

Monks there are six occasions which cannot become. What six? 1. One who has right view (stream enterer) is one who cannot cling to *saṅkhāras* as permanent ... cannot cling to *saṅkhāras* as happy ... cannot cling to *dhammas* as *attā* ... cannot commit

¹⁷⁵ *rūpaṃ ... vedanā ... saññā ... saṅkhārā ... viññānaṃ aniccanti iti imesu pañcasu upādānakkhandhesu aniccānupass viharati ... cakkhuṃ ... rūpaṃ ... sotaṃ ... saddā ... ghānaṃ ... gandhā ... jivhā ... rasā ... kāyo ... phoṭṭabbā ... mano ... dhammā anattā ti iti imesu chasu ajjhattikabāhiresu āyatanesu anattānupassī viharati* (A V 109).

¹⁷⁶ p. 118.

¹⁷⁷ p. 118.

anantariyakamma ... cannot believe in purification through auspicious objects ... cannot search for a gift-worthy outside (this teaching).¹⁷⁸

Another reference cited compares the differences between an *ariya* and an ordinary person.

Ānanda, a monk in this *dhammavinaya*, is certain that it is impossible, it cannot happen that a person possessing right view (stream enterer) could cling to *saṅkhāras* as permanent ... could cling to *saṅkhāras* as happy ... could cling to *dhammas* as *attā*. This is no such possibility.

But he understands that it is possible that an ordinary person might cling to *saṅkhāras* as permanent, might cling to *saṅkhāras* as happy, might cling to *dhammas* as *attā*. There is such a possibility.¹⁷⁹

The commentary has explained this saying thus:

In the part about clinging to *attā*, the Buddha does not say *saṅkhāras* but says *dhammas* to include *nibbāna* and *paññatti* (designation) for example the *kaṣiṇas* (meditation objects) also.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ *chay imāni bhikkhave abhabbatthānāni. katamāni cha. abhabbo diṭṭhisampanno puggalo kañci saṅkhāraṃ niccato upagantuṃ abhabbo diṭṭhisampanno puggalo kañci saṅkhāraṃ sukhato upagantuṃ abhabbo diṭṭhisampanno puggalo kañci dhammaṃ attato upagantuṃ abhabbo diṭṭhisampanno puggalo anantariyakammaṃ kātuṃ abhabbo diṭṭhisampanno puggalo kotuhalamaṅgalena suddhiṃ paccāgantūṃ abhabbo diṭṭhisampanno puggalo ito bahiddhā dakkhineyya gavesituṃ* (A III 439).

¹⁷⁹ M III 64.

¹⁸⁰ *attato upagamanavāre kaṣiṇādipaṇṇattiyā nibbānassa ca saṅgaṇhanatthaṃ saṅkhāraṇaṃ ti avatvā kiñci dhammaṇaṃ ti vuttaṃ* (Moh (Be) 276).

In a footnote to this passage, Payutto cites the Aṭṭhakathā and ā ikā explaining that in the previous saying of the Buddha ‘any *dhamma*’ for the *ariya* means all *dhammas* in the four *bhūmī*, but for the ordinary person only *dhammas* in the three *bhūmī*.¹⁸¹

Monks, an ordinary person who has not heard the Dhamma perceives earth ... water ... fire ... wind ... perceives the seen as the seen. Having perceived the seen as the seen, he conceives himself as the seen, conceives himself in the seen conceives himself apart from the seen, conceives the seen to be ‘mine’, he delights in the seen. Why is that? Because he has not fully understood it. The ordinary person perceives *nibbāna* as *nibbāna*. Having perceived *nibbāna* as *nibbāna*, he conceives himself as *nibbāna*, conceives himself in *nibbāna*, conceives himself apart from *nibbāna*, conceives *nibbāna* to be mine, he delights in *nibbāna*. Why is that? Because he has not fully understood it.

Monks, when the bhikkhu is an *arahant*, destroyed *āsava* (cankers), he directly knows knows earth ... water ... fire ... wind ... etc. Having directly known the seen as the seen, he should not conceive himself as the seen, he should not conceive himself in the seen, he should not conceive himself apart from the seen, he should not conceive the seen to be ‘mine’, he should not delight in the seen. Why

¹⁸¹ p. 121; Mp II 2; Ps IV 107.

is that? So that he may fully understand it. A monk directly knows *nibbāna* as *nibbāna*. Having directly known *nibbāna* as *nibbāna*, he should not conceive himself as *nibbāna*, he should not conceive himself in *nibbāna*, he should not conceive himself apart from *nibbāna*, he should not conceive *nib-bāna* to be ‘mine’, he should not delight in *nibbāna*. Why is that? So that he may fully understand it.¹⁸²

In explaining the previous reference, Payutto divides *maññanā* or *maññita* (conviction) into three types:

1. *Taṇhāmaññanā*, namely, convinced from desire that “*etaṃ mama*” (that is mine).

2. *Mānamaññanā*, namely, convinced from *māna* that “*esohamasmi*” (I am this).

3. *Diṭṭhimaññanā*, namely, convinced from *diṭṭhi* that “*eso me attā*” (this is my *attā*)¹⁸³

He goes on to re-emphasize that normally the ordinary person clings to *attā*, but Brahmins have developed the thoughts in clinging to *attā* deeper and even more refined. Buddhism arose within the

¹⁸² *idha bhikkhave assutavā puthujjano ... paṭhavim ... āpaṃ ... tejaṃ ... vāyaṃ ... pe ... diṭṭha ... suttaṃ ... mutaṃ ... viññātaṃ ... ekattaṃ ... nānattaṃ ... sabbaṃ ... nibbānaṃ nibbānato saññānāti nibbānaṃ nibbānato saññātvā nibbānaṃ maññāti nibbānasmiṃ maññāti nibbānato maññāti nibbānammeti maññāti nibbānaṃ abhinandati. taṃ kissa hetu. apariññātaṃ tassāti vadāmi ... yopi so bhikkhave bhikkhu arahaṃ khīṇāsavo ... paṭhavim ... āpaṃ ... tejaṃ ... vāyaṃ ... pe ... diṭṭha ... suttaṃ ... mutaṃ ... viññātaṃ ... ekattaṃ ... nānattaṃ ... sabbaṃ ... nibbānaṃ nibbānato abhijānāti nibbānaṃ nibbānato abhiññāya nibbānaṃ na maññāti nibbānasmiṃ na maññāti nibbānato na maññāti nibbānammeti na maññāti nibbānaṃ nābhinandati. taṃ kissa hetu. pariññātaṃ tassāti vadāmi ... khayā rāgassa vītārāgattā ... khayā dosassa vītadosattā ... khayā mohassa vītamohattā (MI 1-5).*

¹⁸³ p. 125.

thought of *ātmavādins* or *attadiṭṭhi* of Brahmins, but it taught the reverse of the thought of Brahmins.¹⁸⁴ The *attā/ātman* thought and *anattā* are basic principles that are the differences between Brahmanic religion and Buddhism.¹⁸⁵ The Buddha also teaches Brahmins that to be true Brahmins i.e. an *arahant*, they must abandon *attā*, that is, the clinging to *attā*, to become *attañjaha*.¹⁸⁶ I could see that similarly to Buddhādāsa, Payutto places a lot of emphasis on what he sees as the crucial distinction between Buddhist doctrine of *anattā* and *ātman* of Brahmanic Hindus. It is an argument that both Buddhādāsa and Payutto like to repeat again and again, although as mentioned earlier Buddhādāsa does not see as much separation between Buddhist and Brahmanic thought as Payutto. It is also an argument which the many supporters of the *anattā* perspective like to raise.

The (true) Brahmin does not state that there is purity through other paths, not even (schools which hold purity) in what is seen, what is heard, observing rules, or what is known. The (true) Brahmin does not cling to merit and demerit, has abandoned (clinging to or seeing that I am or there is) *attā/self* and does not create condition in this world.¹⁸⁷

Before Payutto moves on to the twelfth section, which contains most of the references taken to argue that *nibbāna* is *anattā*, he provides a conclusion from the arguments so far.

¹⁸⁴ p. 126.

¹⁸⁵ p. 127.

¹⁸⁶ p. 127.

¹⁸⁷ *na brāhmaṇo aññatto suddhimāha diṭṭhe sute sīlavate mute vā puñṇe ca pāpe ca anūpalitto attañjaho na idha pakubbamāno* (Sn 154).

- ‘No word of the Buddha state that there is *attā* in any situation except in the conventional (as agreement for communication).’
- ‘Words of the Buddha rejecting *attā* are found throughout.’
- ‘Anything that can be clung to as *attā*, the Buddha rejects all.’
- ‘Beyond the clinging of the ordinary person, there is no matter of *attā* to debate on whether or not *nibbāna* is *attā*.’
- ‘There is no place for the interpretation that *nibbāna* is *attā/ātman*.’
- ‘At the time of the Buddha, there appears to be no-one who clings to *nibbāna* as *attā/ātman* to be a matter for consideration.’¹⁸⁸

2.3.4 Sections 12-15

The twelfth section is an important section, in which Payutto lists all references, which he claims that these are where the Tipiṭaka and the Aṭṭhakathā state that *nibbāna* is *anattā*. He claims that, throughout the book, especially this section, no reading, interpretation, opinion, words or experiences of any *thera* or teachers is included.¹⁸⁹ Any interpretation or opinion is put into parentheses. As I mentioned earlier, Payutto’s objective in writing this book is to show what the Theravāda texts actually state avoiding personal opinion of any sort. He is attempting to provide the standpoint of Theravāda Buddhism that *nibbāna* is *anattā* from only the authority of Tipiṭaka and the commentaries.

As it will be clear in the following sections, Payutto actually relies more on the commentaries than on the Tipiṭaka to argue his

¹⁸⁸ p. 128.

¹⁸⁹ p. 129.

standpoint. What is generally assumed in this book is that the scripture can be presented to the reader directly, free of any interpretation by the author. However, it is evident that both Payutto and, as we shall see, Phutthathamprathip, rely on different understandings and assumptions in reading these texts and as a result arrive at different standpoints.

Before listing the references, Payutto clarifies the meaning of ‘is *anattā*’. He states that ‘is *anattā*’ means a negation of *attā* and does not mean a thing called *anattā* that is the opposite of *attā*.¹⁹⁰ Whereas the clinging that is opposite of *attā* is called *nirattā*, which is the clinging that there is no *attā* in the annihilationists’ perspective.¹⁹¹ *Attā* and *nirattā* are to do with clinging, but *anattā* is to do with knowledge (wisdom/insight).¹⁹²

From the references that he is about to give, Payutto concludes that ‘in the Buddhist scriptures, beginning from the Tipiṭaka and the Aṭṭhakathā, there is no single piece of evidence, which states that *nibbāna* is *attā*, but on the contrary there is plenty of evidence, which states that *nibbāna* is *anattā*’.¹⁹³

All *saṅkhāras* that are conditioned are
impermanent, suffering and *anattā*, and
paññatti and *nibbāna* are considered as
anattā.¹⁹⁴

This passage is one of the most controversial passages in this debate. There are two versions of translations of this passage; this particular one gives support to the *anattā* perspective, the other one

¹⁹⁰ p. 129.

¹⁹¹ p. 130.

¹⁹² p. 130.

¹⁹³ p. 130.

¹⁹⁴ *aniccā sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhānattā ca saṅkhatā nibbānañ c’ eva paññatti anattā iti nicchayā ti* (Vin V 86).

gives support to the *attā* perspective. Both translations are grammatically possible. Therefore, the translation depends totally upon how the translator would like to interpret the passage. In a footnote, Payutto points out that some people have translated this verse as ‘*paññatti* that is *nibbāna* is considered as *anattā*’, which is clearly an incorrect translation as shown by the explanation of the commentaries:¹⁹⁵

In this point saying *nibbānaṃ ceva paññatti* in the Pāli is explained as follows:

Due to the concept, for example, of ‘person’, being a conventional truth, dependent on conception of *saṅkhatadhammas* (conditioned *dhammas*), it does not exist in the *paramattha* (ultimate), and so it should not be stated as consisting of two characteristics, namely, impermanence and suffering which are marked by genesis and destruction, but it should be stated as *anattā* for it is without the state that is *attā*, which is marked by, for example, Doer and Feeler or Experiencer. Therefore, together with *nibbāna* that exists, even conception too, is said to be “considered to be *anattā*” for being equally unconditioned.

For a convention though it does not exist, is unconditioned for it is not caused by any factor.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ p. 131.

¹⁹⁶ *pāḷiyaṃ nibbānaṃ c’ eva paññattī ti ettha yasmā saṅkhatadhamme upādāya paññattā sammutisaccabhūtā puggalādīpaññatti paramatthato avijjamānattā uppattivināsayuttavattudhammaniyatena anicca-dukkhalakkhaṇadvayena yuttā ti vattuṃ ayuttā kāravadedakādirūpena pana parikappitena attasabhāvena virahitattā anattā ti vattuṃ yuttā. tasmā ayaṃ paññatti pi asaṅkhatattasāmaññato vattubhūtena nibbānena saha anattā iti nicchayā ti vuttā. avijjamānā pi hi sammuti kenaci paccayena akatattā asaṅkhatā evā ti (Vmv (Se) II 351).*

Paññatti are concepts and do not exist therefore are not given the characteristics of impermanence and suffering, only *anattā*, exactly in the same way as *nibbāna*. This is how Payutto understands it.

Nirodha is a synonym of and can be used interchangeably with *nibbāna* and *virāga*. As *Vibhaṅga Aṭṭhakathā* states that ‘*nibbāna* is *nirodhasacca*’.¹⁹⁷

The Four Truths (*dukkha, samudaya, nirodha, magga*) are penetrated as one (by one *magga ñāṇa*) by the meaning of being *anattā*. The state of *nirodha* of extinguishing also has the meaning of being *anattā*.¹⁹⁸

The words ‘by the meaning of being *anattā*’ mean by the meaning of being *anattā* since the Four Truths is a state without *attā*.¹⁹⁹

Grouped as one is explained that all *dhammas* are grouped as one by twelve conditions, namely, by the meaning of being thus, by the meaning of being *anattā*, by the meaning of being true.²⁰⁰

All *dhammas* are grouped as one are conditioned *dhammas* (*sakhāra*/five aggregates) and unconditioned *dhamma* (*nibbāna*). Grouped means considered by being one.

¹⁹⁷ Vibh-a 415.

¹⁹⁸ *anattaṭṭhena cattāri saccāni ekapaṭivedhāni ... nirodhassa nirodhaṭṭho anattaṭṭho* (Paṭis II 105).

¹⁹⁹ *anattaṭṭhenā ti catunnampi saccānaṃ attavirahitattā anattaṭṭhena* (Paṭis-a III 593).

²⁰⁰ *ekasaṅgahatā ti dvādasahi ākārehi sabbe dhammā ekasaṅgahitā tathaṭṭhena anattaṭṭhena saccaṭṭhena* (Paṭis I 105).

By the meaning of being thus is by the meaning of there exists, that is, by the meaning of existing according to their states.

By the meaning of being *anattā* means without *attā* that is Doer, Feeler or Experiencer.²⁰¹

The following references concern the phrase:

sabbe saṅkhāras anicca sabbe dhammā anattā ti

All *saṅkhāras* are impermanent, all *dhammas* are *anattā*.²⁰²

1. ‘All *saṅkhāras* are impermanent’ means all *saṅkhāras* in the three *bhūmi* (planes) (*kāmāvacara bhūmi*, *rūpāvacarabhūmi*, *arūpāvacarabhūmi*) are impermanent.

2. ‘All *dhammas* are *anattā*’ means all *dhammas* in the four *bhūmi* (*kāmāvacarabhūmi*, *rūpāvacarabhūmi*, *arūpāvacarabhūmi*, *lokuttarabhūmi*, that is, *magga*, *phala*, *nibbāna*) are *anattā*.²⁰³

3. ‘All *dhammas* are *anattā*’, the Buddha includes *nibbāna* also.²⁰⁴

²⁰¹ *sabbe dhammā ekasaṅgahitā ti sabbe saṅkhatāsaṅkhatā dhammā ekena saṅgahitā paricchinā. tathaṭṭhenā ti bhūtaṭṭhena, attano attano sabhāvasasena vijjammānaṭṭhenā ti attho. anattaṭṭhenā ti kāravavedakasāṅkhātena attanā rahitaṭṭhena* (Paṭis-a I 331).

²⁰² S III 134.

²⁰³ *sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā ti sabbe tebhūmakasaṅkhārā aniccā. sabbe dhammā anattā ti sabbe catubhūmakadhammā anattā* (Spk II 318).

²⁰⁴ *sabbe dhammā anattā ti nibbānaṃ antokarivā vuttaṃ* (Nidd-a II 8).

4. ‘All *dhammas* are *anattā*’ include even *nibbāna* also, named *anattā* by the meaning of not abiding to power/powerless.²⁰⁵

5. *Dhamma* that is *nibbāna* void (empty) of *attā* for there is no *attā*.²⁰⁶

6. All *dhammas* even conditioned (*saṅkhārā*) and unconditioned (*nibbāna*) are void (empty) of *attā* for there is no person that is *attā*.²⁰⁷

7. *Nibbāna* is stated separately as two, *aggrasuñña* (highest emptiness) and *paramattha-suñña* (ultimate emptiness) and *saupādisesa-nibbāna* and *anupādisesa-nibbāna*. The two kinds of *nibbāna* are equal as a state empty of *attā* and that belonging to *attā*, and a state empty of *saṅkhārā*.²⁰⁸

Then, Payutto gives a conclusion to this important section, which I will paraphrase closely to the Thai. The references of the Tipiṭaka and the Aṭṭhakathā refute directly *attā*, no matter how many aspects there are.²⁰⁹ That is, they do not have to refute any aspects of *attā*, but refute *attā* once in all aspects.²¹⁰ They refute the idea of *attā* that it does not exist in the *paramattha*, in the sense that, it is not necessary to say how or in what aspect it is *attā* because they do not deny the different meanings of *attā*, but refute the word *attā*

²⁰⁵ *sabbe dhammā ti nibbānampi antokarivā vuttā. anattā avasavatta-naṭṭhena* (Nidd-a I 221; Paṭis-a I 62).

²⁰⁶ *nibbānadhammo attass’ eva abhāvato attasuñño* (Paṭis-a III 637).

²⁰⁷ *saṅkhatāsaṅkhatā pana sabbepi dhammā attasaṅkhātassa puggalassa abhāvato attasuñña ti* (Paṭis-a III 639).

²⁰⁸ *nibbānaṃ aggaparamatthavasena sa-upādisesa-anupādisesavasena ca dvidhā katvā vuttaṃ. tāni dve attattaniyasuññato saṅkhārasuññato ca sabhāgāni* (Paṭis-a III 637).

²⁰⁹ p. 136.

²¹⁰ p. 136.

very directly, once and for all, that there is no *attā* in *paramattha*.²¹¹ Whereas for the conventional *attā*, that is, ‘self’ used in everyday language, there is no problem. ‘Apart from the *attā* already refuted, all references to *attā* are to conventional *attā* only.’²¹²

This section aims at attacking the Dhammakāya Foundation article’s reading of *sabbe dhammā anattā*.

The words *sabbe dhammā anattā*, all *dhammas* are *anattā*, have been much quoted. How wide is the limit of *sabbe dhammā anattā*? For there are Aṭṭhakathā references saying that ‘all *dhammas*’ include *nibbāna* also ...; and there are also Aṭṭhakathā references that says ‘all *dhammas*’ only refers to the five aggregates and does not include *nibbāna*.²¹³

Payutto refutes this reading and argues that the Aṭṭhakathā references do not disagree at all, but there are two contexts.

First context: when the Buddha states:

sabbe dhammā anattāti
All *dhammas* are *anattā*.²¹⁴

The Aṭṭhakathā explains as:

‘All *dhammas* are *anattā*’ means all *dhammas* in the four *bhūmi* are *anattā*.²¹⁵

²¹¹ p. 136.

²¹² p. 136.

²¹³ Thanwuttho, pp. 23-4.

²¹⁴ S III 134.

²¹⁵ *sabbe dhammā anattā ti sabbe catubhūmakadhammā anattā* (Spk II 318).

This explanation is clear and without exception.

Second context: in specific places, there is a condition attached at the end.

When one sees with wisdom that all *dhammas* are *anattā*, then, one will get wearied of suffering. This is the path of purity.²¹⁶

In this situation, the Aṭṭhakathā explains fully that:

‘All *dhammas* are *anattā*’ means all *dhammas* in the four *bhūmi* (*kāmāvacarabhūmi*, *rūpāvacarabhūmi*, *arūpāvacarabhūmi*, *lokuttarabhūmi*, that is, *magga*, *phala*, *nibbāna*) are *anattā*.

But here, only *dhammas* in the three *bhūmi* are taken.²¹⁷ In some places, the Aṭṭhakathā only takes the last paragraph.

This is a clear example of what Payutto understands as *neyārtha* and *nītārtha* teachings, one requiring further clarification and one states the reality. He explains that the first version states the absolute, which is all *dhammas* in the four *bhūmi*, including *nibbāna*, are *anattā*.²¹⁸ Whereas in the second version, the meaning is limited to a specific situation, which is indicated by the word, *idha*, meaning ‘in this place/in this situation’, and the word, *gahetabbā*, meaning ‘to be taken’.²¹⁹ He explains that the verse which is followed by *atha nibbindati dukkhe* meaning ‘then, one will get wearied of suffering’

²¹⁶ *sabbe dhammā anattā ti yadā paññāya passati atha nibbindati dukkhe esa maggo visuddhiyā* (Dh 279 - 80; Th 678).

²¹⁷ *sabbe dhammā anattā ti sabbepi catubhūmakā dhammā anattā. idha pana tebhūmikadhammā va gahetabbā* (Th-a III 4).

²¹⁸ p. 139

²¹⁹ p. 139.

indicates the feeling of the practitioner of insight meditation on the five aggregates before the release from the clinging to the five aggregates.²²⁰ For Payutto *nītārtha* is all things are *anattā*, it is the absolute reality, whereas five aggregates are *anattā* are taught in a specific time and place, i.e. during insight meditation, to a particular audience, i.e. insight meditation practitioners. However, for the proponents of the *attā* perspective all *dhammas* are *anattā* is *neyārtha* because one needs to clarify further that all things in this sense means all *saṅkhāra* and concepts with the exception of *nibbāna*. *Nītārtha* according to them would be *nibbāna* is *attā*.

The next argument, Payutto re-asserts what he already lays out many times in this book based on the three verses ending with *sabbe dhammā anattā*. *Sabbe dhammā anattā* is clearly the most quoted verse in support of the *nibbāna* is *anattā* perspective. This fact is also agreed by the supporters of the *nibbāna* is *attā* perspective.

Using logical hypotheses, this section aims at attacking another point that Thanwuttho makes, namely, when the five aggregates are impermanent, suffering and not self, *nibbāna* that is not subject to the three characteristics and is permanent and happy, ought to be self.

And *nibbāna* exists and is certainly beyond the three characteristics for there are words of the Buddha confirming that *nibbāna* is *niccaṃ* meaning permanent and perpetual and supremely happy [...] *nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ* meaning *nibbāna* is supremely happy.²²¹

²²⁰ p. 140.

²²¹ Thanwuttho, p. 24.

It should be considered that, in reverse, when *nibbāna* is permanent and happy, we can come to the conclusion that what is permanent that is happy, what is happy that ought to be *attā*.²²²

Payutto asserts it is an incorrect use of logic like the following sentences:

Life that can move by itself, that life is animal. All life that is animal must die.²²³

And concluding the following:

“Plant is life that cannot move by itself, so it is not animal. Therefore, a plant cannot die.”²²⁴

To conclude in this way is not correct ‘for life that is plant must die also’.²²⁵ For death encompasses all and do not just refer to animals. Similarly to “all *dhammas* is *anattā*”, encompasses not only things that are impermanent and suffering, but also things that are permanent and happy as well.²²⁶ Just as life has a wider meaning than just animal, it also refers to plants, *dhammas* likewise has a wider meaning than just *saṅkhāras* (*saṅkhatadhamma*), it refers to *nibbāna* as well.²²⁷

This aims at refuting the *attā* perspective’s reading of references that seems to connect the word *attā* with *nibbāna*, but Payutto

²²² Thanwuttho, p. 25.

²²³ p. 144.

²²⁴ p. 144.

²²⁵ p. 144.

²²⁶ p. 144.

²²⁷ p. 144.

argues that none of these references could be read in anyway to mean that *nibbāna* is *attā*.

Know one's *nibbāna*.²²⁸

Study one's *nibbāna*.²²⁹

The *Mahāniddesa* further explains:

‘Study one's *nibbāna*’ ...one's *nibbāna* means (study) for the extinguishing of one's greed, hatred and delusion.²³⁰

Moreover, the *Aṭṭhakathā* explains similarly:

‘Study one's *nibbāna*’ means study higher morality, for example, for the sake of extinguishing of defilements, for example, greed.²³¹

Whereas the *Udāna* explains that ‘one's’ means *maggāñāṇa* and *phalañāṇa*, which are *saṅkhata-dhammas*, thus the self here is only the conventional self.²³²

The next point, Payutto refutes the reading of an important reference that is commonly used by proponents of the *attā* perspective to mean that there is *attā* in the ultimate sense. Payutto argues that the teaching of depending on oneself means ‘the pushing of the process of causes and factors called *dhammas* towards the goal’, i.e. ‘not depending on luck or waiting for someone do it instead’.²³³ There-

²²⁸ *jaññā nibbānam attano* (Ud 28).

²²⁹ *sikkhe nibbānam attano* (Sn 183).

²³⁰ *sikkhe nibbānamattano ti ... nibbānamattano ti attano ragassa nibbānāya dosassa nibbānāya mohassa nibbānāya* (Nidd I 421).

²³¹ *sikkhe nibbānamattano ti attano rāgādīnaṃ nibbānatthāya adhisīlādīni sikkheyya* (Pj II 592).

²³² Ud-a 192.

²³³ p. 147.

fore, he argues depending on oneself is depending on the Dhamma by practising the Dhamma.²³⁴

*attadīpā viharatha attasaraṇā
anaññasaraṇā dhammadīpā
dhammasaraṇā anaññasaraṇā*

You must be one who has self as island, self as shelter, nothing else as shelter. You must be one who has Dhamma as island, Dhamma as shelter, nothing else as shelter.²³⁵

Ānanda, how does a monk live with self as island, self as shelter, nothing else as shelter, with Dhamma as island, Dhamma as shelter, nothing else as shelter. Monks in this *dhammavinaya* abides contemplating the body as body ... feeling ... mind ... all *dhammas*.²³⁶

According to Payutto it should be interpreted as follows: ‘depending on oneself = depending on Dhamma = bring Dhamma to practise = practise according to the Four *Satipaṭṭhāna* = able to depend on oneself = having Dhamma as refuge’²³⁷. *Attā* here is meant in the conventional sense, when explained by the commentaries, it is stated to be Dhamma or *dhammakāya* (which Payutto understands to mean the collection of Dhamma or qualities).²³⁸ Apart from refer-

²³⁴ p. 147.

²³⁵ D II 100.

²³⁶ *kathaṇ ca ānanda bhikkhu attadīpo viharati attasaraṇo anaññasaraṇo dhammadīpo dhammasaraṇo anaññasaraṇo. idhānanda bhikkhu kāye kāyanupassī viharati ... vedanāsu ... citte ... dhammesu* (D II 100).

²³⁷ p. 148.

²³⁸ It is very interesting to note that in the commentary one of the things *attā* is explained to mean is *dhammakāya*. As we shall see, the proponents of the *attā* perspective would argue that this is exactly what Luang Pho Wat Paknam says: that *dhammakāya* is *attā* and *dhammakāya* of the arahat is equated with *nibbāna*.

ring to the practice of the Four Satipaṭṭhāna, it is also given the meanings of: Dhamma,²³⁹ *lokīyalokuttaradhammas*,²⁴⁰ nine *lokuttaradhammas*,²⁴¹ *dhammakāya* (of which highest are nine *lokuttaradhammas*)²⁴² etc., depending on the level of practice. Payutto argues that *attā* is never used as a goal that must be attained.²⁴³ Thus there is no mentioning of ‘attaining *attā*’ or reaching/merging with *attā* or *ātman*.²⁴⁴ The arguments regarding the depending on self is an argument, which all supporters of *nibbāna* is *anattā* perspective have to address in arguing their point. It is therefore done so here by Payutto.

2.3.5 Sections 16-24

The remaining sections of this chapter, Payutto provides no more references concerning *nibbāna*, so the important arguments from this point will be briefly summarized. From what has been argued Payutto claims that these are the charges that the Dhammakāya Foundation article is guilty of:

1. Taking the Pāli words from the Tipiṭaka and the Aṭṭhakathā and inserting new meaning according to the school’s own beliefs
2. Citing the Tipiṭaka and the Aṭṭhakathā, mixing them up and mistranslating them to support the school’s own beliefs
3. When stuck without evidence, it states that the Tipiṭaka records incompletely and cannot be taken as a standard, that the Chinese Tipiṭaka must be brought into consideration, and that Tipiṭaka is an opinion, so the decision of scholars must be considered also

²³⁹ D II 100.

²⁴⁰ Sv III 846.

²⁴¹ Spk III 204.

²⁴² Cp-a 276.

²⁴³ p. 149.

²⁴⁴ p. 149.

4. Bring in personal evidence, interpretation and opinion to cause confusion

5. Claiming the ordinary person cannot understand, but it is able to from the results of practice

6. Bringing in the opinion of *thera*, *mahāthera* or teachers to support it's the schools' own beliefs.²⁴⁵

Payutto concludes that the Dhammakāya Foundation Article is, therefore, guilty of offending the *dhammavinaya*.²⁴⁶

Lastly, Payutto asserts that he is not trying to engage a debate whether *nibbāna* is *attā* or *anattā*. But the point of this work is:

1. To discern whether or not the Buddha teaches that *nibbāna* is *attā*

2. To answer the question whether the principle of Buddhism teaches that *nibbāna* is *attā*?

3. To answer the question of whether the Tipiṭaka (and other scriptures) teaches that *nibbāna* is *attā*?²⁴⁷

As the rest of the book no longer concerns references and arguments that *nibbāna* is *anattā*, I will omit it.

²⁴⁵ p. 162.

²⁴⁶ p. 167.

²⁴⁷ p. 170.

III NIBBĀNA IS ATTĀ

THE PRINCIPLE OF EXAMINATION OF NIBBĀNA-DHĀTU

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In 2001, I found a book called หลักพิจารณาพระนิพพานธาตุตามแนวพระพุทธรดำรัสและอรรถกถา (*Lak Pijarana Nippanthat Tam Naew Phra Buddhadamrad lae Atthakatha*) [*The Principle of Examination of Nibbāna-dhātu according to the Words of the Buddha and the Aṭṭhakathā*]²⁴⁸ in Wat Luang Por Sodh Dhammakayaram²⁴⁹, Ratchaburi province, of which year of publication and the publishing company were omitted. Its authors, a group of Dhamma practitioners, whose pen name is Phutthathamprathip, could not be identified. Have they purposely chosen to be anonymous, perhaps for the reason that their perspective countered the perspective of the Thai academic Buddhism at the time? This was what I speculated when I found it. The book attributes its teaching to many venerated monks, but the most important one being Luang Pho Wat Paknam. It also equates *nibbāna-dhātu*

²⁴⁸ Phutthathamprathip, หลักพระนิพพานธาตุตามแนวพระพุทธรดำรัสและอรรถกถา (*Lak Pijarana Nippanthat Tam Naew Phra Buddhadamrad lae Atthakatha*) [*The Principle of Examination of Nibbāna-dhātu according to the Words of the Buddha and the Aṭṭhakathā*] (Unknown, 1999).

²⁴⁹ This romanized spelling is given in the monastery's website: *Dhammakāya Buddhist Meditation Institute (Wat Luang Por Sodh Dhammakayaram)* <<http://www.en.dhammadaya.org>>. Note that the spelling according to the Royal Institute for this would be Wat Luang Pho Sot Thamkayaram.

with *dhammakāya* that attained *arahatta-phala*. These facts lead me to speculate that it might emanate from the Dhammakāya Foundation or Wat Paknam or one of its branch monasteries. In any case, it is a book, which I have found to have compiled the most arguments both in textual references and in the sayings of venerated monks in support of the *attā* perspective.

In the introduction, the authors briefly mention that the ‘present’ debate, concerning whether the state of *nibbāna* is *anattā* or (real) *lokuttara attā*, is not something to be considered from ‘an information that is obtained carelessly’ and cannot be concluded correctly without a complete examination.²⁵⁰ They warn those who hold ‘false views and lead others to hold the same view as them’, that they will suffer the gravest consequences and may even fall to the *lokantara* (the end of the world).²⁵¹ It is a very serious warning directed at not only those who see *nibbāna* as *anattā*, but also at the preachers of *anattā* perspective. As I will mention, one of these preachers that the book quotes and directly counters is Payutto.

The book consists of an introduction and ten chapters. It is two hundred and fifteen pages long, excluding the introduction and the contents, which are together fourteen pages long. It is written in an academic language in Thai with constant insertion of Pāli into the Thai text and constant reference to scripture. As opposed to *Dhammakāya Case*, which is written for the general audience, this book assumes that the reader possesses a good background in Theravāda Buddhism and Pāli. The content is as follows:

²⁵⁰ p. [2].

²⁵¹ p. [3].

Introduction;

Chapter 1: *arambhakathā*: the three aspects of *nibbāna*;

Chapter 2: the results of the practice of the *supaṭipanno*;

Chapter 3: what has happened before;

Chapter 4: what is *nibbāna*?;

Chapter 5: the meaning of *anattā*;

Chapter 6: the meaning of *attā*;

Chapter 7: chapter of consideration;

Chapter 8: the realization of the four truths by the nature of *anattā*;

Chapter 9: *dhammakāya* is the body attained in Dhamma of the *tathāgata-sammāsambuddha*, the *paccekabuddha* and the *arahats*. It is the *nibbāna-dhātu*...etc.;

Chapter 10: methods of *vipassanā* reaching *dhammakāya* and entering *magga-phala*.

As there is a word limit to this, I will focus mainly on arguments that make scriptural references and the arguments that concern *nibbāna* as *attā*. Chapter one which lays out the basic principles will be summarized and paraphrased below in this section. Chapter two, which is compiled from sermons by venerated monks and chapter three, which consists of stories and a saying from the Tipiṭaka warning ‘learned monks who do not practise’ and the readers not to fall prey to the annihilationist perspective, will be omitted. As the argument of chapter eight shall be stated within the content of chapter five, I shall omit it. Chapter nine through various references equates *dhammakāya* with *nibbāna-dhātu*, which has the characteristic of *attā*. As this chapter does not directly concern the topic

of this thesis, it shall be omitted. Moreover, Chapter ten, which consists of two meditation methods, one old, and one recent, which mention the reaching of *dhammakāya* shall be omitted.

I have had the pleasure of visiting Venerable Phra Rajyanvisith, the abbot of Wat Luang Por Sodh Dhammakayaram in Ratchaburi on 20 August 2003 when I was collecting background data for this thesis. When I discussed the debate with him, he explained to me what he saw as the background to this debate. The content of the next two paragraphs are my paraphrases from what he actually said:²⁵²

‘In the last one hundred years, students of Buddhist Studies have described *nibbāna* as *anattā* according to the words of the Buddha, ‘*sabbe dhammā anattā*’. However, some practitioners argued that these words are a method of *vipassanā*, the examination of the five aggregates according to the true nature, as impermanent, suffering and *anattā*. This method prepares the way for the *nibbidā ñāṇa* (*ñāṇa* of weariness of the *saṅkhāras*) for those who have neither reached *gotarabhū-ñāṇa* (the *nāṇa* of one who is between the state of the worldly and that of the noble), nor have entered the stream of *nibbāna*. Therefore, it is believed by the practitioners that ‘*sabbe dhammā anattā*’ does not refer to *nibbāna*. They saw that in the case of the *pañcavaggīya* (the first five disciples of the Buddha), who have become *sotāpanna* (stream-enterer) and have entered the stream of *nibbāna*, the Buddha preached the *Anatta-lakkhaṇa Sutta* comparing the opposite characteristics of *attā* and *anattā*, the *pañcavaggīya* then attained *magga-phala* to become *arhats*. Further, they saw that, for those who are about to attain *magga-phala*, having seen the forty characteristics of *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anattā* of the five aggregates, they will gain *anuloma-khanti* (wisdom that sees the three characteristics of *saṅkhāras*) and see the extinguishing of the five

²⁵² From an interview with Venerable Phra Rajyanvisith at Wat Luang Por Sodh Dhammakayaram, Ratchaburi, 20 August 2003.

aggregates as *nibbāna*, which has the opposite characteristic to *anattā*, before entering *magga-ñāṇa* and *phala-ñāṇa*. For these reasons, those who are considered to have practiced at a very high level see *nibbāna-dhātu* in the *paramattha* to be *visaṅkhāra-dhamma* and/or *asaṅkhata-dhamma*, which has the total opposite characteristic to *saṅkhāras/saṅkhata-dhammas*, namely the five aggregates; they saw *nibbāna* as having the characteristic of *attā*.’

‘A number of practitioners held this perspective, but have not directly addressed the topic like the scholars of the scripture, who were considered not to have practised at a high level by some. Luang Pho Wat Paknam, Bhasichareon, who has taught a method of *samatha-vipassanā*, argued to be in accordance with the four *satipaṭṭhāna* leading to *dhammakāya* and *nibbāna*, stated that *nibbāna-dhātu* is the *amata-dhamma*, the *virāga-dhātu*, the *virāga-dhamma*, and is the state of permanence, supreme happiness and real *attā* (opposite to the worldly *attā*). Many forest practitioners, for example, Luang Pu Man and Luang Ta Mahaboowa have described the characteristic of *nibbāna* in similar ways. However, their perspective was refuted by the scholars, for the practitioners did not show any textual evidence in support of their claim to the public. Later, there are those who see themselves as practitioners, who have compiled evidences from the Tipiṭaka and the commentaries together with the evidence from their practices in support of their claim that *nibbāna-dhātu* in the *paramattha* has the characteristic of *attā*.’

It is a very different background from Payutto’s who started from the Third Buddhist Rehearsal pointing out the doctrinal differences between what he sees as Theravāda, *Puggalavāda* and Brahmins. As opposed to seeing that Thai Theravāda Buddhists have always held that *nibbāna* is *anattā*, Phra Rajyanvisith believes that it is only the scholars that held this view in the past. The practitioners did not. It is also a distinction that *Principle of Examination*

constantly makes and often calls those who hold the *nibbāna* is *anattā* ‘scholars who do not practice’.

Before going into details of the third chapter, I would like to summarize the basic arguments of this book, which are found in the Introduction and Chapter one, which will help readers understand better the specific details of the arguments below.

The approach of this book seems to be to compile references for the *attā* perspective pointing out how to read and interpret each reference. It has no intention of rejecting the authority of any of the texts, interestingly including the commentaries. The hypothesis of the authors is: ‘If referring to *nibbāna*, in any respect, as having a characteristic or a state of without the essence and the substance in being self, then, it is *anattā*. However, if stating *nibbāna*, in any respect, that it has the characteristic or the *dhamma* state of substance and the essence in being self (having the state that is opposite to nature of *anattā*), then, it is real *attā* (not *sammuti attā*).’²⁵³

There are three basic principles in the understanding of Phutthatham-prathip, one is what I call ‘the characteristics of the unconditioned self’, the second is ‘the inseparability of the three characteristics’, and the third is ‘the opposite characteristics of the conditioned and the unconditioned’. These three principles are as follows:

A comparison between the attributes of *attā* with the attributes of *anattā* by example of the five aggregates is found in the *Anattā lakkhaṇa Sutta*. Readers should remember this *Sutta* as it is one of the most important texts cited in support of this perspective.

²⁵³ pp. [8]-[9].

‘Body, monks, is not *attā*. Now, were this body *attā*, this body would not tend to sickness, and one get the chance in saying in regard to body, ‘Let body become thus for me. Let the body not become thus for me.’ But inasmuch, monks, as body is *anattā*, therefore body tends to sickness and one does not get the chance in saying in regard to body, ‘This body become thus for me. Let the body not become thus for me.’²⁵⁴

‘Does not become sick’ is the most important attribute to what is *attā*, which also, according to the authors, implies permanence and happiness. From this attribute the author explains that whatever this *attā* is, the reference points out that it has ‘substance and essence of the true self (*attā*)’, through which one is able to say let it become as one wishes, let the it not become thus for me (i.e. not subject to birth, aging, pain and death).²⁵⁵ ‘Substance and essence of the true self’ is the authors’ understanding of what is *attā*, which is very different from Payutto’s understanding, which connects *attā* with clinging having no real existence, as that of a picture we create in our minds.

And vice versa, the attribute of what *anattā*, the lack of essence and substance of self, is to become sick and is powerless in the face of decay and death, which according to the authors, implies impermanence and suffering. This is supported by the saying in the *Samyuttanikāya* in the *Arahatta Sutta*, also one of the most important arguments used in support of this perspective.

²⁵⁴ *rūpaṃ bhikkhave anattā. rūpaṃ ca h’ idaṃ bhikkhave attā abhavissa na-y-idaṃ rūpaṃ ābādhāya saṃvatteyya labbhettha ca rūpe evaṃ me rūpaṃ hotu evaṃ me rūpaṃ mā ahoṣī ti. yasmā ca kho bhikkhave rūpaṃ anattā tasmā rūpaṃ ābādhāya saṃvattati na ca labbhati rūpe evaṃ me rūpaṃ hotu evaṃ me rūpaṃ mā ahoṣī ti* (Vin I 13).

²⁵⁵ p. [6].

*yad aniccaṃ taṃ dukkhaṃ yam dukkhaṃ
tad anattā.*

What is impermanent that is suffering (cannot endure forever in the same state, those who grasp it with craving and view, suffer). What is suffering that is not self.²⁵⁶

What is actually meant in these two quotes is that impermanence, suffering, and *anattā* are like chains of three hoops tied to each other, the qualities are inseparable and are not free from each other.²⁵⁷ The inseparable chain of three hoops, whose picture is given at the back of the book, is a vivid simile of the authors' understanding of the nature of the three characteristics. They provide this simile many more times in the book.

For the third principle, the opposite characteristics of the conditioned and the unconditioned, the Vibhāga 6, which is the twelve opposing characteristics of the five aggregates and *nibbāna* given in the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* (Paṭis II 238), is cited in support of it. In the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* the conditioned and the unconditioned *dhammas* are described in comparison. This is explained in detail on pages 6 - 14 of the first chapter of this book.

The authors argue that it is not possible to understand the characteristics of the unconditioned until one truly understands the implications of the characteristics of the conditioned. At the moment when the insight meditation practitioner has thoroughly examined the five aggregates according to the three characteristics, he or she then develops a supramundane wisdom that is able to penetrate into the unconditioned *dhamma*. At this point, the moment of entering

²⁵⁶ S III 22. The words in parentheses are the authors', p. [6].

²⁵⁷ p. [7].

the fruit of the Buddhist path called *sammattaniyāma*, the conditioned and the unconditioned can be compared as follows: on the conditioned side, impermanence, suffering and not self are found together with the characteristics of these three marks; on the unconditioned side permanence, supreme happiness and substance and essence in being self that is released from all defilements are found. Therefore, they have completely opposite characteristics.

Paṭisambhidāmagga lists the forty conditions of *saṅkhāras/saṅkhata-dhammas*, these are then put against the opposite the characteristics of the unconditioned.²⁵⁸ The book provides the actual passage for the conditioned *dhammas* and then put both characteristics of the conditioned and the unconditioned side by side in a table in comparison:

A monk gains *anuloma-khanti* (realization of the three marks of existence) by how many conditions? Enters *sammattaniyāma* by how many conditions? A monk gains *anuloma-khanti* by forty conditions. Enters *sammattaniyāma* by forty conditions?

How does a monk gain *anuloma-khanti* by forty conditions? How does he enter *sammattaniyāma* by forty conditions?

The monk examines the five aggregates by their nature of impermanence, suffering, becoming ill, being like a boil, being like an arrow, hardship, becoming sick, being the other, being that which is decayed, bringing the bad, being evil, being dangerous, being an obstacle, being afraid, being that which is rotten, being

²⁵⁸ Paṭis II 238. The words in parentheses are mine.

not lasting, being without a resistance, being without a protection, being without refuge, being empty, being bare, being void, being *anattā*, being harm, having change as norm, being without an essence, the root of hardship, being like an executioner, being a decay, having *āsava*, being conditioned, being a victim of *māra*, having birth as norm, having aging as norm, having sickness as norm, having death as norm, having grief as norm, having lamentation as norm, having despair as norm, having sorrow as norm.

When examining the five aggregates by their nature of impermanence, he gains *anuloma-khanti*. When examined the extinguishing of the five aggregates to be *nibbāna*, as permanent, he enters *sammattaniyāma*

When examining the five aggregates by their nature of having sorrow as norm, he gains *anuloma-khanti*. When examining the extinguishing of the five aggregates, to be *nibbāna*, as without sorrow, he enters *sammattaniyāma*.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁹ *katihākārehi anulomikaṃ khantiṃ paṭilabhati katihākārehi sammattaniyāmaṃ okkamati. cattārīsāya ākārehi anulomikaṃ khantiṃ paṭilabhati cattārīsāya ākārehi sammattaniyāmaṃ okkamati. katamehi cattārīsāya ākārehi anulomikaṃ khantiṃ paṭilabhati katamehi cattārīsāya ākārehi sammattaniyāma okkamati. pañcakkhandhe aniccato dukkhato rogato gaṇḍato sallato aghato ābādhato parato palokato ūtito upaddavato bhayato upasaggato calato pabhaṅgato addhuvato attāṇato aleṇato asaraṇato rittato tucchato suññato anattato ādīnavato vipariṇāmadhammato asārakato aghamūlato vadhakato vibhavato sāsavato saṅkhatato māraṃsisato jātidhammato jarādhammato byādhidhammato maraṇadhammato sokadhammato paridevadhammato upāyāsadhammato saṅkilesikadhammato pañcakkhandhe aniccato passanto anulomikaṃ khantiṃ paṭilabhati pañcannaṃ khandhānaṃ nirodho niccaṃ nibbānanti passanto sammattaniyāmaṃ okkamati... pañcakkhandhe saṅkilesikadhammato passanto anulomikaṃ khantiṃ paṭilabhati pañcannaṃ khandhānaṃ nirodho asaṅkiliṭhaṃ nibbānanti passanto sammattaniyāmaṃ okkamati. (Paṭi II 238-241).*

I have tried to reproduce the table:²⁶⁰

<u>Conditioned dhamma</u>	<u>Unconditioned dhamma</u>
1. <i>Aniccaṃ</i> (that which is impermanence)	1. <i>Niccaṃ nibbānaṃ</i> (<i>nibbāna</i> is permanent)
2. <i>Aniccalakkhaṇaṃ</i> (the characteristic of that which is impermanence):	2. <i>Nicca-lakkhaṇaṃ</i> (the characteristic showing that <i>nibbāna</i> has the state of permanence):
being that which is decayed,	<i>nibbāna</i> does not have decaying as norm,
being afraid,	<i>nibbāna</i> does not have the nature of being afraid,
being that which is rotten,	<i>nibbāna</i> does not have the nature which is rotten,
being not lasting,	<i>nibbāna</i> is that which is lasting,
having change as norm,	<i>nibbāna</i> does not have change as norm,
being without an essence,	<i>nibbāna</i> has an essence,
being a decay,	<i>nibbāna</i> does not have the nature of being a decay,
being conditioned,	<i>nibbāna</i> does not have conditions,

²⁶⁰ pp. 10-14.

having death as norm.	<i>nibbāna</i> does not have death.
3. <i>Dukkhaṃ</i> (suffering).	3. <i>Sukhaṃ nibbānaṃ</i> (<i>nibbāna</i> is happy).
4. <i>Dukkha-lakkhaṇaṃ</i> (the characteristic showing suffering):	4. <i>Sukha-lakkhaṇaṃ</i> (the characteristic showing happiness).
becoming ill,	<i>nibbāna</i> does not have illness,
being like a boil,	<i>nibbāna</i> does not have a boil,
being like an arrow,	<i>nibbāna</i> does not have arrow,
hardship,	<i>nibbāna</i> a does not have hardship,
becoming sick,	<i>nibbāna</i> does not have sickness,
being the other,	<i>nibbāna</i> does not have an other as a condition,
bringing the bad,	<i>nibbāna</i> does not have that which brings the bad,
being evil,	<i>nibbāna</i> does not have evil,
being dangerous,	<i>nibbāna</i> does not have danger,
being an obstacle,	<i>nibbāna</i> does not have obstacle,

being without a resistance,	<i>nibbāna</i> is a resistance,
being without a protection,	<i>nibbāna</i> is a protection,
being harm,	<i>nibbāna</i> does not have harm,
the root of hardship,	<i>nibbāna</i> does not have root of hardship,
being like an executioner,	<i>nibbāna</i> is not like an executioner,
having <i>āsava</i> ,	<i>nibbāna</i> does not have <i>āsava</i> ,
being a victim of <i>māra</i> ,	<i>nibbāna</i> is not a victim of <i>māra</i> ,
having birth as norm,	<i>nibbāna</i> does not have birth,
having aging as norm,	<i>nibbāna</i> does not have aging,
having sickness as norm,	<i>nibbāna</i> does not have sickness,
having death as norm,	<i>nibbāna</i> does not have death,
having grief as norm,	<i>nibbāna</i> does not have grief,
having lamentation as norm,	<i>nibbāna</i> does not have lamentation,
having despair as norm.	<i>nibbāna</i> does not have despair.
5. <i>Anattā</i> . Not self, not a real, lasting self of anyone (only unreal self, that the world designates or gives as “a doer, an experiencer, a possessor of own power”).	5. <i>Paramatthaṃ nibbānaṃ</i> . <i>Nibbāna</i> is supremely beneficial.

6. *Anatta-lakkhaṇaṃ*.

The mark that shows the nature of not self, the opposing characteristic to self (*attapaṭikkhepa*):

that which is not a refuge,

empty (of the unreal *attā*, that is *attā-lokīya* that the world designates or gives as a doer, an experiencer, a possessor of own power),

bare (of substance and essence),

void (must become extinct from its state)

that which has sorrow by defilements as norm,

not content from bonds (not freed from that which binds beings to various existences, namely bonds of sense-desires, bonds of becoming, bonds of views, bonds of ignorance).

6. *Atta-lakkhaṇaṃ*: The mark that shows the nature of (real) *attā*, liberated from defilements and cankers and void of *saṅkhāra*. It is a characteristic that opposes *anattā* (*anattapaṭikkhepa*).

nibbāna is a refuge,

nibbāna is not void (*arittaṃ*) from the real self, that is released, liberated from the defilements and cankers,

nibbāna is not empty (*atucchaṃ*) of substance and essence,

nibbāna is supremely void (*paramaṃ suññaṃ*) from the defilements and cankers, from the unreal (*lokiya*) *attā*, and all that is arises from *attālokiya*,

nibbāna does not have the nature of sorrow by the defilements and cankers,

nibbāna is freed from bonds, free from *dhammas* that bind beings to various existences (*yogakkhemaṃ*).

It should be noted that instead of translating *paramatthaṃ* as merely ultimate, highest or supreme, the authors have chosen to add the word beneficial. They further explain this term that it is the *arahat's attā lokuttara* that possesses the substance and the essence in being the real self, that is released from the defilements and cankers, as the Buddha teaches “know the self’s *nibbāna*” and “(*nibbāna*) does not become sick”.²⁶¹ Therefore it is the real *attā-vimutti*. Moreover, *attalakkhaṇaṃ* is the characteristic, which the authors argue to be implied in the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*.

3.2 PRINCIPLE OF EXAMINATION

3.2.1 Chapter 4: what is *nibbāna*?

The fourth chapter is headed ‘What is *Nibbāna*?’ and sets out to define what *nibbāna* is and how its characteristics should be understood. It is divided into four main sections. The first section lists the description of *nibbāna* found in the *Tipiṭaka* and the *Aṭṭhakathā*. The second section is headed ‘the Principle of Examination of the Characteristic of *Nibbāna*’ and provides references to its characteristics and how these characteristics should be examined. The fourth section, ‘The Three Aspects of *Nibbāna*’, elaborates on the topic of the second section and what has been said previously at the beginning of the introduction. The last section is the section of ‘Consideration’, in which the authors provide their understanding of what has been said in the chapter.

I have selected the important synonyms for *nibbāna* provided in this book, which are *dīpa*, a refuge; *saraṇa*, getting rid of harm; *tāna*, a place for protection; *lena*, a place of security; *parāyṇa*, reach-

²⁶¹ p. 12.

ing and remain there;²⁶² *accuta*, *dhamma* that does not move to become other; and *amata-dhamma* that does not die.²⁶³ The word *dīpa* and *saraṇa*, is very important, as we shall see, this is then linked with the *attadīpa* and *attasaraṇa* in the *Attadīpa Sutta* (D III 77).

The second section consists of six characteristics of *nibbāna* found in the *Tiṭṭhaka* and the *Aṭṭhakathā*:

1. Supremely happy.²⁶⁴

2. *Asaṅkhatadhamma*, the nature that cannot be conditioned by a cause, the highest reality (*paramattha-dhamma*) that truly exists.²⁶⁵ This characteristic is taken from the third *Nibbāna Sutta* in the *Udāna*.²⁶⁶

There exists, monks, that which is unborn, that which is unbecome, that which is uncreated, that which is unconditioned. For if there were not, monks, that which is unborn, that which is unbecome, that which is uncreated, that which is unconditioned, there would not be made known here the escape from that which is born, from that which is become, from that which is created, from that which is conditioned. Yet since there exists, monks, that which is unborn, that which is unbecome, that which is uncreated, that which is unconditioned, there

²⁶² Spk III 112

²⁶³ Kv 316.

²⁶⁴ *nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ* (Dhp 204).

²⁶⁵ p. 39.

²⁶⁶ *atthi bhikkhave ajātaṃ abhūtaṃ akataṃ asaṅkhatam. no ce taṃ bhikkhave abhaviṣṣa ajātaṃ abhūtaṃ akataṃ asaṅkhatam, na-y-idha jātaṃ bhūtaṃ katassa saṅkhatassa nissaraṇaṃ paññāyetha, yasmā ca kho bhikkhave atthi ajātaṃ abhūtaṃ akataṃ asaṅkhatam tasmā jātaṃ bhūtaṃ katassa saṅkhatassa nissaraṇaṃ paññāyati* (Ud 80-81).

is therefore made known the escape from that which is born, from that which is become, from that which is created, from that which is conditioned.

The authors expand on this by giving the characteristics of *asaṅkhata-dhamma*. The qualities of the unconditioned are:

Arising does not appear;
 passing away does not appear;
 when stands, it is not subject to change.²⁶⁷

This as I will mention later is an important quote, which will be argued that if something were to stand and not subject to change that standing *dhamma*, must, therefore, exist and does not become annihilated.

3. *Nibbāna* is permanent, perpetual, stable and lacks change.²⁶⁸

4. *Nibbāna* is *amata-dhamma* (deathless *dhamma*), *dhamma* without birth, without aging, without pain, without death.²⁶⁹

5. *Āyatana* (*nibbāna*), a place or sphere without suffering, only happiness:

²⁶⁷ *na uppādo paññāyati na vayo paññāyati na ihitassa aññathattaṃ paññāyati. imāni kho bhikkhave tīṇi asaṅkhatassa asaṅkhatalakkhaṇāni ti* (A I 152).

²⁶⁸ *nibbānaṃ niccaṃ dhuvāṃ sassataṃ avipariṇāmadhammanti asaṃhiraṃ asaṅkappaṃ* (Ndd II 56).

²⁶⁹ *pañcakkhandhe jātiddhammato passanto anulomikaṃ khantiṃ paṭilabhati pañcannaṃ khandhānaṃ nirodho ajātaṃ nibbānanti passanto sammattaniyāmaṃ okkamati, pañcakkhandhe jarādharmato passanto anulomikaṃ khantiṃ paṭilabhati pañcannaṃ khandhānaṃ nirodho ajaraṃ nibbānanti passanto sammattaniyāmaṃ okkamati pañcakkhandhe byādhidhammato passanto anulomikaṃ khantiṃ paṭilabhati pañcannaṃ khandhānaṃ nirodho abyādhidhammaṃ nibbānanti passanto sammattaniyāmaṃ okkamati pañcakkhandhe maraṇadhammato passanto anulomikaṃ khantiṃ paṭilabhati pañcannaṃ khandhānaṃ nirodho amataṃ nibbānanti passanto sammattaniyāmaṃ okkamati* (Paṭi II 241).

There is, monks, *āyatana* (*nibbāna*) where there is neither earth, nor water, nor fire, nor wind, nor that base consisting of endless space, nor that base consisting of endless consciousness, nor that base consisting of nothingness, nor that base consisting of neither perception nor non-perception, nor this world, nor the next world, nor both sun and moon in that *āyatana* (*nibbāna*). Monks, I do not speak of that *āyatana* (*nibbāna*) that it is coming, or going, or remaining, or falling, or arising. That *āyatana* (*nibbāna*) is without foundation, without occurrence, without object. This is the end of *dukkha*.²⁷⁰

The authors, then, give the meaning of *āyatana*. The meaning of the word *āyatana* is an ‘abiding place’ (*vasatthāna*). Its synonyms appear in the *Abhidhānappadīpikā*, which is not a canonical text, but a dictionary composed by a Sinhalese monk.²⁷¹

- (i) Country of birth (*sañjātidesa*)
- (ii) Cause (*hetu*)
- (iii) Dwelling place (*vāsatthāna*)
- (iv) Source (*ākra*)
- (v) Assembly place (*samosaraṇatthāna*)
- (vi) Making a portion full (*padapūraṇa*)

Then, they argue that in the statement from the *Udāna*, the Buddha means that *nibbāna* is the ‘abiding place of *nibbāna-dhātu*.²⁷² It is clear from the understanding of *āyatana* (*nibbāna*) as an abiding place that the authors based their understanding of *nibbāna*

²⁷⁰ Ud 80.

²⁷¹ Phra Chao Varawongsader Kromaluang Jinavarasirivadhana Somdej Phra Sangharaja Chao, *Abhidhānappadīpikā*, 3rd edition (Bangkok: Mahamakutratwitthayalai, 1987), p. 226.

²⁷² p. 43.

on Luang Pho Wat Paknam's *thammakai* meditation system. For *āyatana* is understood by Luang Pho Wat Paknam as a dwelling place of Buddhas and *arahants*.

The first four characteristics, therefore, can be seen as characteristics with shared interpretation between the two sides of the debate. No argument arises from these. However, when we come to the fifth and sixth characteristics, their interpretations are no longer shared by both sides. The ways the authors see both *āyatana* and *nibbāna-dhātu*, are rejected by the advocates of the *anattā* perspective.

Apart from this part and the following section on the three aspects of *nibbāna*, not much else in the rest of book is said about *āyatana-nibbāna*. It is clear to me that the objective of this book is primarily concerned with countering the *nibbāna* is *anattā* perspective, especially Payutto's, and arguing that *nibbāna* is *attā*, more than arguing for or defending the *thammakai* interpretation of *āyatana-nibbāna* and *dhammakāya*.

6. *Nibbāna-dhātu* is of two types: *saupādisesa-nibbāna-dhātu* is the *nibbāna-dhātu* of the *arahat* who still possesses the five aggregates and *anupādisesa-nibbāna-dhātu*, the *nibbāna-dhātu* of the *arahat* whose five aggregates have extinguished. This term is interpreted as nature where the state of *nibbāna* is situated. It is what abides in *āyatana* (*nibbāna*).

Monks, what is *anupādisesa-nibbāna-dhātu*?

The monk in this *dhammavinaya* is an *arahat*, the passionless one, who has ended the *brahmacāriya*, done what is to be done, abandoned the burden, attained his own benefit, extinguished the fetters of existence, released

by the knowledge. All *vedanā* in the body of that monk is the nature, (which all defilements for example craving) can no longer be enjoyed, and have cooled (extinguished). Monks, I call this *anupādisesa nibbāna-dhātu* ...etc...

Whereas *dhātu*, which occurs in *dhamma* that goes in front, is a place where all existence have extinguished in all respects, is (*nibbāna-dhātu*), where *upādi* (five aggregates) no longer remain.²⁷³

Further, the explanation of the term *nibbāna-dhātu* in the *Atthakathā*:

Nibbāna is named *dhātu* because of the meaning of there is no being and no life and because of the meaning of the holder or of the state (of *nibbāna*), for these reasons it is named *nibbāna-dhātu*.²⁷⁴

It is also clear from the understanding of *nibbāna-dhātu* as nature where the state of *nibbāna* is situated that the authors based this understanding on Luang Pho Wat Paknam's *thammakai* meditation system as well for this characteristic is the same as what Luang Pho Wat Paknam calls *phra nipphan* described as the *dhammakāya* that has attained *arahatta-phala* of Buddhas and *arahants* that dwell in *āyatana (nibbāna)*.

²⁷³ *katamā ca bhikkhave anupādisesā nibbānadhātu idha bhikkhave bhikkhu arahaṃ hoti khīṇāsavo vusitavā katakaraṇīyo ohitabhāro anuppattasadattho parikkhīṇabhavasamaṃyojano sammadaññā vimutto tassa idheva bhikkhave sabbavedayitāni anabhinanditāni sītibhavissanti ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhave anupādisesā nibbānadhātu ... anupādisesā pana samparāyikā yamhi nirujjhanti bhavāni sabbaso (It 38 – 39).*

²⁷⁴ *tadeva nissattanijjivaṭṭhena sabhāvadhāraṇaṭṭhena ca dhātu ti nibbānadhātu (It-a I 164).*

From the six characteristics outlined above, one could already see that three aspects of *nibbāna* - state, dweller and dwelling place - can be distinguished similarly to Luang Pho Wat Paknam as I have explained in Chapter 1 of this thesis. However, the three aspects that are only implied in the teaching of Luang Pho Wat Paknam, are explicitly stated by the authors, both on pages 1 -2 in chapter one and then elaborated further on pages 49 - 57 of chapter 4.

The authors claim that these aspects are taught in the scripture:

1. The first aspect is *nibbāna* as ‘a state/virtue/a characteristic’.²⁷⁵ It is a state without defilements, craving, bonds and suffering; an unconditioned *dhamma* (*asaṅkhata-dhamma*); permanent (*niccaṃ*), perpetual (*dhuvam*), stable (*sassataṃ*) and lacks change (*avipariṇāma-dhammaṃ*); an eternal *dhamma*), not subjected to birth, aging, pain and death; the supremely happy (*paramam sukham*) etc.²⁷⁶ This aspect corresponds to the first four characteristics.

2. The second aspect of *nibbāna* is *nibbāna* as ‘a nature that holds in the state of *nibbāna*, “*nibbāna-dhātu*”’.²⁷⁷ This aspect corresponds to the sixth characteristic.

3. The third aspect of *nibbāna* is *nibbāna* as ‘a place to which the *asekha* (*arahants*) go without sorrow’,²⁷⁸ and an *āyatana*, an abiding place (*vasanaṭṭhāna*).²⁷⁹ This aspect corresponds to the fifth characteristic.

²⁷⁵ p. 2.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ It-a I 164.

²⁷⁸ *ahiṃsakā ye munayo niccaṃ kāyena saṃvutā te yanti accutaṃ ṭhānaṃ yattha gantvā na socare* (Dhp 225 - 6).

²⁷⁹ Ud 80.

The first aspect is given the attributes of permanent, supremely happy and (real) *attā*.²⁸⁰ This real *attā* being *attā* that would not tend to sickness as stated in the *Anatta-lakkhaṇa Sutta* and also a *dhamma* in the *paramattha* within:

In the word, *attadīpā*, for example, *dhamma* in the *paramattha* named “*attā*” refers to *dhamma* within.²⁸¹

The second aspect is called the *asaṅkhata-dhātu*, *nirodha-dhātu* or *nibbāna-dhātu*. This is equated with *dhammakāya* that is *attā*.²⁸² *Dhammakāya* as understood by Luang Pho Wat Paknam is there given an important synonym of *nibbāna-dhātu*.

The third aspect of *nibbāna* is *nibbāna* as a place. This is given support from a reference to the *Dhammapada*, and its *Aṭṭhakathā*:

Sages who do not harm, constantly restrained in body, they go to the place without birth, where, having gone, they do not grieve.²⁸³

The word *accutaṃ* means permanent. The word *ṭhānaṃ* is a place that does not aggravate, a place that is perpetual. The word *yattha* means that the sages go to the place, *nibbāna*, where (the *asekha*) go and do not grieve, that is, are not troubled.²⁸⁴

²⁸⁰ p. 49.

²⁸¹ *attā nāmettha paramatthato dhammo abbhantaraṭṭhena* (Sv-pṭ II 188).

²⁸² pp. 52-53.

²⁸³ *ahiṃsakā ye munayo niccaṃ kāyena saṃvutā te yanti accutaṃ ṭhānaṃ yattha gantvā na socare* (Dhp 225-6).

²⁸⁴ *accutanti sassataṃ. ṭhānanti akuppaṭṭhānaṃ dhuvaṭṭhānaṃ. yatthā ti yasmim gantvā na socanti na vihaṇṇanti, taṃ nibbānaṭṭhānaṃ gacchanti ti attho* (Dhp-a III 321).

Then the authors go on to say that *nibbāna* in its true nature is not only a state void of defilement, craving and suffering, but also the holder of the state *nibbāna* that is *nibbāna-dhātu*.²⁸⁵ Because without *nibbāna-dhātu*, in which the state of *nibbāna* is situated, the state of *nibbāna* cannot exist; like goodness, badness, suffering and happiness, without the holder of these states namely human or animal, they cannot exist.²⁸⁶ When there is a nature that possesses a state, there must be a dwelling place for that nature, but the dwelling place of the possessor of *nibbānadhātu* is a land void of *sankhāra*, so it is a place without birth, that is, it does not move from one existence to another.²⁸⁷

The three aspects of *nibbāna* can again be seen as deriving from the understanding of Luang Por Wat Paknam and also a development of it. As I already said the second aspect corresponds to what Luang Pho Wat Paknam calls *phra nipphan*, the *dhammakāya arahatta* of Buddhas and *arahants*. Many advocators of the *attā* perspective share a common understanding that the state of the *nibbāna* has to have an object where it is situated. The Saṅgharāja (Phae Tissadevo) goes on in detail about how a purity of an object cannot exist alone, that it must have an object where it is situated, for example, the purity of water must exist in the water and the cleanliness of clothes must exist in the clothes, the ideas of which echoes that statement of the authors in the previous paragraph. Where this object is simply called *attā* by the Saṅgharāja, it is called *dhammakāya arahatta* which is described as *attā* by Luang Pho Wat Paknam. But in this book the authors not only base their understanding on Luang Pho Wat Paknam that this object is *dhammakāya arahatta*, which is *attā*, but they go further to equate it with the term *nibbānadhātu*. Moreover, the third aspect, *āyatana (nibbāna)* is described simi-

²⁸⁵ p. 52.

²⁸⁶ p. 52.

²⁸⁷ p. 53.

larly to Luang Pho Wat Paknam as supra-mundane sphere beyond the three realms, beyond the reach of any being ordinary consciousness and can only be reached by the *dhammakāya-ñāṇa*.²⁸⁸ This is again developed further as being the dwelling place of *nibbānadhātu*, which is *dhammakāya arahatta* of Buddhas and *arahants*.

3.2.2 Chapter 5: the meaning of anattā

Chapter five is headed, ‘the Meaning of *Anattā*’. It is an important chapter of the book, in which the authors elaborate and determine the scope of the word *anattā*. This chapter provides the understanding of *anattā* from the point of view of those who see *nibbāna* as *attā* (*attā* perspective), which is very different from the understanding of those who see *nibbāna* as *anattā* (*anattā* perspective). A large part of this chapter is, therefore, devoted to arguing that *sabbe dhammā anattā* does not refer to *nibbāna*; an argument that runs counter to the interpretation of Thai academic Buddhists over at least the last century. A number of paragraphs of this chapter include quotations of the works of Payutto, to which the authors direct their arguments. In this chapter the authors explain precisely how the Aṭṭhakathā’s commentaries on *sabbe dhammā anattā* are to be interpreted and give their understanding of the term *paññattidhamma*.

In the beginning of chapter 5, the authors explain the word *anattā* as ‘the state of all nature that is without the substance and essence of being self, person, us-them, ours-theirs. In short, it is the state that is not *attā*’.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁸ p. 48.

²⁸⁹ p. 58.

The principle of the inseparability of the three characteristics is the main argument of this chapter. This principle can be summarized as that when all the characteristics of the *tilakkhaṇa* and their associated characteristics are inseparable, *nibbāna*, which is permanent and supremely happy cannot have the characteristic of *anattā*, for *anattā* is one with impermanence and suffering and is fixed upon *saṅkhata-dhamma*. This is one of the main arguments of this perspective. As we shall see, the authors will argue further that as the principle of inseparability is taken from the words of the Buddha in the *suttas*, all the commentarial references regarding *anatta* must be seen in accordance to this principle:

What is impermanent, that is suffering. What
is suffering, that is not self.²⁹⁰

According to the authors what is *anattā* is also suffering and not self as well:

But inasmuch, monks, as *rūpa* is *anattā*, therefore *rūpa* tends to sickness (*ābādhāya* is equivalent to *dukkhalakkhaṇa*).²⁹¹

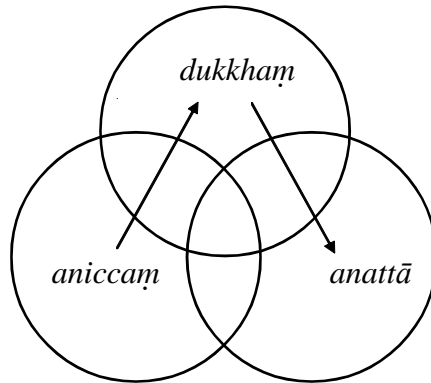
The Buddha therefore states the principle in the first quote and then states it in reverse in the second quote, where the word sickness is taken as a synonym of the word suffering. The authors argue that this shows ‘the oneness, the linkage within the condition of the relationship according to *tilakkhaṇa* or *sāmañña-lakkhaṇa* namely *anicca-lakkhaṇa*, which is equal in meaning to *dukkha-lakkhaṇa* which is equal in meaning to *anatta-lakkhaṇa*.’²⁹² This principle can be summarized in diagrams:

²⁹⁰ S III 22

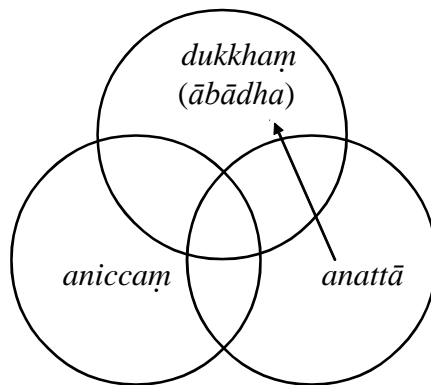
²⁹¹ Vin I 13. The words in parentheses are given by the author, p. 60.

²⁹² p. 60.

The first quote:



The second quote:



Both quotes therefore as argued by the authors, show the principle of inseparability of the three characteristics.

Moreover, state the authors, what is *anattā* is essentially only the five aggregates, as the Buddha has stated in the *Anatta-dhamma Sutta*:

The venerable Rādha addressed the Exalted One. “*Anatta-dhamma! Anatta-dhamma!* Lord, what is *anattadhamma?*” The Buddha answered, “Rādha, *rūpa ... vedanā ... saññā ... saṅkhāra ... viññāṇa* (are) *anatta-dhamma*. So seeing, Rādha, the well-taught *ariya* feels aversion from *rūpa ... vedanā ... saññā ... saṅkhāra ... viññāṇa*. When he feels aversion, he abandons desire, when he abandons desire, he is released. When released, he has the *ñāṇa* that knows: “Rebirth is destroyed, lived is the righteous life, done is my task, for life in this condition there is not hereafter.”²⁹³

As *saṅkhata-dhamma* are subject to causes and conditions, arising and ceasing according to the chain of dependent origination, only it has the characteristics of *aniccam*, *dukkham* and *anattā*, the opposite characteristics to *asaṅkhata-dhamma*.²⁹⁴ The characteristics of *saṅkhata-dhamma* are: arising occurs (*uppdo paññāyati*); passing away occurs (*vayo paññāyati*); and when it stands, changeability occurs (*ṭhitassa aññathattaṃ paññāyati*).²⁹⁵ Whereas, the characteristics of *asakhata-dhamma* are: arising does not occur (*na uppādo paññāyati*); passing away does not occur (*na vayo paññāyati*); when it stands, changeability does not occur (*na ṭhitassa aññathattaṃ paññāyati*).²⁹⁶

Therefore, argue the authors, the three characteristics cannot be separated. The image of the inseparability of the three characteristics is given as three hoops of chains tied together, whichever hoop

²⁹³ S III 196 - 7.

²⁹⁴ p. 61.

²⁹⁵ A I 152.

²⁹⁶ A I 152.

is lifted, other two hoops are taken up with it.²⁹⁷ Whenever the Buddha states a characteristic by itself, it is for the reason of citing the characteristic of the *tilakkhaṇa*; the other characteristics, which are inseparable to it, are also embraced.²⁹⁸

In fact, seeing *anicca-lakkhaṇa* is also seeing *anatta-lakkhaṇa*, because when seeing one of the three characteristics, the other two are also seen.²⁹⁹

The next section is the section of ‘Consideration’. It is divided into seven points. The first point concerns the meanings of *anatta-lakkhaṇa*. *Anatta-lakkhaṇa* in the Tipiṭaka and the Aṭṭhakath, state the authors, has at least four aspects: void, lack of owner, not being dominant or not abiding according to power, and negating *attā*:

The four aspects of *anatta-lakkhaṇa* are:

1. *Suññataṭṭhena*: with the meaning of being void (of the conventional self).

2. *Assāmikaṭṭhena*: with the meaning without an owner.

3. *Anissaraṭṭhena* or *avasavattanaṭṭhena*: with the meanings not being dominant or not abide according power.

4. *Attapaṭikkhepaṭṭhena*: with the meaning of opposing *attā*.³⁰⁰

The authors state that their purpose is to elaborate on the characteristic of *anatta-dhamma* without contradicting the principle of inseparability of the three characteristics. The authors go on to say

²⁹⁷ p. 64.

²⁹⁸ p. 64.

²⁹⁹ *aniccalakkhaṇe hi diṭṭhe anattalakkhaṇaṃ diṭṭhameva hoti. tīsu hi lakkhaṇesu ekasmiṃ diṭṭhe itaradvayaṃ diṭṭhameva hoti* (Ud-a 236).

³⁰⁰ p. 63

that the two of these four aspects, namely, being void and not abiding according to power, are wrongly taken up by themselves to argue that this is the reason why *nibbāna* is *anattā* because *nibbāna* does not abide according to power, and that as *nibbāna* is *anattā*, *nibbāna* is also void i.e. non-existence. Not abiding according to power has certainly been used by Buddhādāsa and Payutto to argue their point, however, neither Buddhādāsa nor Payutto would use void to argue that *nibbāna* is non-existent, they would only say that it is void of any kinds of *attā*. In fact, Payutto goes into detail that the fact that *nibbāna* is *anattā* does not mean that *nibbāna* is non-existent for that would constitute an annihilationist's view. The interpretation of void as non-existence implies that the authors are also countering other views on *nibbāna*, one that corresponds to the annihilationist's kind.

The authors in the last chapter have already explained that when *nibbāna* is described as void, it is meant that it is void of defilements, ignorance, craving, clinging and all *saṅkhāras*.³⁰¹ When it is said that it is void of self, it is meant that it is void of worldly self and that belonging to the worldly self.³⁰² In this chapter they develop their argument further that 'by the word "void", the Buddha does not mean that "there is no *attā* that is a *paramattha-dhamma*", in the way some people understood.³⁰³ *Attā* that is a *paramattha-dhamma* truly exists, but *paramattha-dhamma* is void of conventional (*sammuti*) *attā*, namely, doer/experiencer etc.³⁰⁴ Then, they quote the *Cūla-suññatā Sutta*:

Formerly I, Ānanda, as well as now, through abiding in emptiness, regularly abide. As this palace of Migra's mother is empty of elephants, cows, horses and mares, empty of

³⁰¹ p. 47.

³⁰² p. 47.

³⁰³ p. 67.

³⁰⁴ p. 67.

gold and silver, empty of assemblages of men and women, and there is only this that is not emptiness, that is to say the solitude grounded on the Order of monks; even so Ānanda, a monk, not attending to the perception of village, not attending to the perception of human beings, attends to solitude grounded on the perception of forest. His mind is satisfied with, pleased with, set on and freed in the perception of forest. He comprehends thus: ‘The disturbances there might be resulting from the perception of village do not exist here; the disturbances there might be resulting from the perception of human beings do not exist here. There is only this degree of disturbance, that is to say solitude grounded on the perception of forest.’ He comprehends, ‘This perceiving is empty of the perception of village.’ He comprehends, ‘This perceiving is empty of the perception of human beings. And there is only this that is not the perception of human beings. And there is only this that is not emptiness, that is to say solitude grounded on the perception of forest.’ He regards that which is not there as empty of it. But in regard to what remains there he comprehends, ‘That being, this is.’ Thus, Ānanda, this comes to be for him a true, not a mistaken, utterly purified realization of emptiness.³⁰⁵

³⁰⁵ M III 104 -5.

Then citing from the Aṭṭhakathā, the authors explain that it is analogous to an empty house or an empty pot, which does not mean that “the house or the pot does not exist” but only means that the house or the pot is void of the other things, things that have no substance and essence of being a house or a pot only.

The *Cūla-suññatā Sutta* exemplifies a kind of interpretation of the word *suññatā* that is similar to the interpretation of the *suññatā* in the *Tathāgata-garbha* school of thought. *Tathāgata-garbha* is a stream of thought or a philosophical trend in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Its corresponding sources are, for example, *Tathāgata-garbha Sūtra*, *Srīmālādevīsīṃhanāda Sūtra*, *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, and the treatise called *Ratnagotravibhāga (Uttaratantra)*. Its basic teaching is the presence of the *Tathāgata-garbha* (embryo of the *Tathāgata*) in all beings, which is their potentiality to attain Buddhahood. *Tathāgata-garbha Sūtra* teaches through nine examples that no matter how defiled a being might be, in the vision of the Buddha, it possesses the *Tathāgata-garbha*, and one day that being will attain Buddhahood. But what is interesting in the *Tathāgata-garbha* school of thought in the context of this debate is that in the *Srīmālādevīsīṃhanāda Sūtra* the *Tathāgata-garbha* is said to be empty. However, this emptiness is not the emptiness of inherent existence as that taught in the Madhyamaka school, but it is the emptiness of ‘all the defilement-stores’, but non-emptiness of ‘the Buddha *dharmas*’, which is called two kinds of emptiness.³⁰⁶ The *Tathāgata-garbha* therefore is unspoiled by the defilements and intrinsically endowed with Buddha qualities even in ordinary beings. This can be seen as a more positive understanding of emptiness than that of the Madhyamaka, which sees all things including *nibbāna* as empty of inherent existence. This interpretation of emptiness bears a lot of similarity to the interpretation of emptiness in the above two quotes: emptiness is

³⁰⁶ *The Lion’s Roar of Queen Śrīmālā: A Buddhist Scripture on the Tathāgata-garbha Theory*, trans. by Alex Wayman and Hideko Wayman (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990), p. 99.

‘that which is not there as empty of it’, but that which is there, is not empty, for example, the pot is empty means that there is no other thing in the pot and does not mean that the pot does not exist. The similarities are to the extent that Skilling has argued that the *Tathāgata-garbha* school has adapted the idea in the *Cūla-suññatā Sutta* into its thinking.³⁰⁷ Similarly, the *Cūla-suññatā Sutta* is taken by the authors to argue that it is the way to understand how *nibbāna* is empty of self, which does not mean that *attā* in the ultimate does not exist, but that *attā* in the ultimate sense truly exists, but is void of conventional or designated *attā*. One then is able to see some connections between the *Tathāgata-garbha* school of thought and the *attā* perspective. As we shall see, in the next chapter, I shall try to compare the two ideas to see what we can understand from their similarities and differences.

As just discussed, the authors emphasize that voidness when applied to *asañkhata-dhamma*, means only the lack of essence in conventional *attā*, and does not mean lack of *attā* in the ultimate:

All *dhamma*, both *sañkhata* and *asañkhata* are void (empty) of *attā* because there is no person, that is, *attā*.³⁰⁸

‘*Asañkhata-dhamma* is void of *attā*’ means that it is void of conventional *attā* and conventional designation as indicated by the word person.

Then, the authors direct their argument against Payutto from *The Dhammakāya Case*. The next few paragraphs in the book are

³⁰⁷ Peter Skilling, *Mrgāra’s Mother’s Mansion: Emptiness and the Śūnyatā Sūtras*, (Unpublished paper, 2005). This paper is a revised version of the author’s lecture given at Ryukoku University on 14 July 2005.

³⁰⁸ *sañkhatāsakhatā pana sabbepi dhammā attasañkhātassa puggalassa abhāvato attasuññā ti* (Paṭi-a III 637).

series of attacks against Payutto. The authors quote directly from *Dhammakāya Case* and *Buddhadhamma* and point out that the quotes are incorrect and are only the personal view of Payutto, which are in danger of leading to annihilationism.

In a short explanation, in this case, the statements in the Tipiṭaka and the Aṭṭhakathā refute *attā* directly, no matter how many aspects. That is, they do not have to refute any aspects of *attā*, but refute *attā* once in all aspects. They refute *attā* that it does not exist in the *paramattha*, in the sense that, it is not necessary to say how or in what aspect it is *attā* because they do not deny the different meanings of *attā*, but refute the word *attā* very directly, once and for all, that there is not *attā* in *paramattha*.³⁰⁹

The authors explain that ‘*nibbāna*, which is *asaṅkhata-dhamma* that has the state of permanence (*niccam*), highest happiness (*paramam sukham*) and exists in the *paramattha* state, when one reaches it, it cannot go back to being *anattā* again because *nibbāna* exists, is not void.’³¹⁰ Then, the authors cite Payutto’s words from *Buddhadhamma*.

Although it is true that what is impermanent, is suffering, is *anattā*, but what is *anattā* is not always necessarily impermanent, and not always necessarily suffering.³¹¹

³⁰⁹ P.A. Payutto, p. 136.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Phra Thepwehi [Prayut Payutto], พุทธธรรม [Buddhadhamma] (Bangkok: Mahachulalongkonrat-witthayalai, 1989), p. 70.

As this contradicts the principle of inseparability of the three characteristics taken from the *Suttas*, the authors state that it is only considered as the personal opinion (*attanomati*) of the writer of the statement.³¹² It is a very bold claim against Payutto who is considered as one of the most knowledgeable scholars of the Pāli canon in Thai academic Buddhism. Perhaps this is the reason why the authors decided to remain anonymous. The purpose of this comment, I assume, may be to direct its arguments to the most prominent leader of the other perspective. As I will show, this is not the only place in the book where Payutto is directly mentioned.

In the next part the authors clarify the term ‘not abiding according to power’. The four meanings of *anatta-lakkhaṇa* are together the meanings of the *tilakkhaṇa* and when one meaning is cited, the other three are also embraced.³¹³ It is not possible, therefore, to separate ‘not abiding according to power’ from void, being without an owner and opposing *attā*.³¹⁴

The five aggregates are named *anattā* because of the Buddha’s remark “what is suffering, that is *anattā*” for example. For what reason? For not abiding according to power. The state that does not abide according to power is characteristic of *anattā*. The three characteristics are objects of one who sees the arising and cessation only.³¹⁵

There are few places in the *Aṭṭhakathā* where all the four meanings are given. It explains not abiding according to power as:

³¹² p. 72.

³¹³ p. 73.

³¹⁴ p. 73.

³¹⁵ *yaṃ dukkhaṃ tadanattā ti vacanato tadeva khandhapañcakaṃ anattā. kasmā? avasavattanato. avasavattanākāro anattalakkhaṇaṃ. imāni tīṇipi lakkhaṇāni udayabbayaṃ passantasseva ārammaṇāni honti* (Nidd-a 107).

Moreover it is named *anattā* because of the meaning not abiding according to power. Or because of the reason that the state that does not abide according to power, cannot occur to anybody within these three conditions, namely, “let body that arises become lasting, let body that is lasting not age, let body that ages not perish”, (body, for example,) is therefore void (*suññaṃ*) of this condition of abiding according to power, because of the lack of owner and because of opposing *attā*. All *dhammas* are named *anattā* for these four reasons.³¹⁶

Moreover, argue the authors, the *Cūlaniddesa* explains that characteristics of *anattā* of not abiding according to power and being void are synonyms and are the characteristics of *sankhata-dhammas*.

The words “examine the world as being void” means that a person examines the world as being void by two conditions, namely, the ability to fix on it as not abiding according to power, and the ability to examine *sankhāra* as being empty. How does a person examine the world as being void by the ability to fix on it as not abiding according to power? Fix on it as one cannot have the power over *rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *sankhāra* and *viññāṇa*.³¹⁷

³¹⁶ *avasavattanañhena pana anattā. yasmā vā etaṃ uppannaṃ ñhitiṃ mā pāpuñātu, ñhānappattaṃ mā jīratu, jarappattaṃ mā bhijjatū ti imesu tīsu ñhānesu kassaci vasavattibhāvo natthi, suññaṃ tena vasavattanākārena. tasmā suññato assāmikato akāmakāriyato attapaṭikkhepato ti imehi catūhi kāraṇehi anattā* (Vibh-a 48).

³¹⁷ Nidd II, 43.

Because *sankhata-dhammas* possesses *sakhata-lakkhaṇa* of arising and passing away, it therefore does not abide according to power; no one is able to control it, force it not to age, not to be in pain and not to pass away.³¹⁸

The next point of this section is headed ‘the limits of the meaning of “*sabbe dhammā anattā*”’.³¹⁹ This is one of the most important sections in this book as *sabbe dhammā anattā* is commonly used by the advocators of the *anattā* perspective, including Buddhādāsa and Payutto, to argue that *nibbāna* is *anattā*. As I have mentioned in the last chapter, in Payutto’s understanding there seem to be some passages, which are regarded as not providing the complete picture, statements that require further clarification, in other words, they can be seen to be *neyārtha* teaching (introductory teaching, not accurate when seen from the ultimate point of view). However, other passages provide a complete picture and require no further clarification, in other words, they are seen to be *nītārtha* teaching, the final teaching or ultimate reality.³²⁰ According to Payutto’s understanding *sabbe dhammā anattā* is regarded a *nītārtha* teaching, for all things without exception are *anattā*. However, passages which state, for example, that *sabbe dhammā anattā* only refers to the five aggregates, in Payutto’s understanding, they are *neyārtha* teaching, which is a limited meaning taken out of the whole picture. This section of the *Principle of Examination*, therefore, is a reverse of the understanding of Payutto, as it shall be argued along the understanding that *sabbe dhammā anattā* is, in fact, a *neyārtha* teaching, one that needs further clarification. For this part, I have also

³¹⁸ p. 77.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ As I mentioned earlier, in using these two terms I am only taking their basic definitions and putting them into the context of this debate to aid the reader’s understanding. The implications attached to these terms regarding the cycle of the wheel of *dharma* (*dharmacakra*) when used by Tibetan commentators to classify certain Mahāyāna texts are not implied when these two terms are used in this book.

taken arguments from the first chapter which have not been mentioned in addition to the arguments in this section of the chapter as well.

Moreover, all *dhamma* states in the four *bhūmi* are not understood as (completely) all *dhammas* because the *Sutta* has contents that must be directed further. But (all) *dhamma* states in the three *bhūmi* only, that are within *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*, are understood as (named) all *dhammas* without exception.³²¹

The authors' understanding of the commentaries is based on their reading of the *suttas* that when the commentators say that *nibbāna* is included in all *dhammas*, they do not refer to *nibbāna-dhātu* but only refer to the following:

1. *nibbāna* as a '*paññatti-dhamma*', namely, that which is uttered, designated or named (*sadda-paññatti*) and/or *nibbāna* that is seen as having *attā* as 'creator, doer, experiencer or possessor of power'.³²² This is the kind of *nibbāna* that is only a designated concept.

2. *nibbāna* as '*dhamma* in the fourth *bhūmī* (the state of penetration of the Four Noble Truths) and the remaining objects of the mind (both *saṅkhāras* and *visakhāra*), which are *saṅkhata-dhammas* and are still *kiriya* (actions), still *sammuti* (conventional) and still subjected to change and/or do not abide according to power (*avasavattanaṭṭhena*)'.³²³ This is further clarified in chapter 8 of this book. An example of this kind of *nibbāna* is of an insight meditator who is on the verge of gaining one of the noble fruits, is able

³²¹ *neyyatthattā cassa suttassa na catubhūmikāpi sabhāvadhammā sabbadhammā ti veditabbā. sakkāyapariyāpannā pana tebhūmikadhammāva anavasesato veditabbā* (Ps I 18).

³²² p. 5.

³²³ p. 5.

have *nibbāna* as an object of contemplation. At this moment, the meditator has *nibbāna* as an object, but has not attained *nibbāna-dhātu*, i.e. has not attained the fruit of the noble one but only on the verge of doing so. That very state, which is distinguished from *nibbāna-dhātu*, is what the authors call action, conventional, still subject to change and does not abide according to power, therefore, *anattā*. Another example, is that of the five aggregates of the enlightened while they are still alive, are *anattā* for they do not abide according to power.

The *nibbāna* mentioned above are, therefore, within the scope of the conditioned *dhamma*. *Saṅkhāras/saṅkhata-dhammas* are, then, defined by the authors as ‘*dhammas* in the three *bhūmī* (*kāma-bhūmī*, *rūpa-bhūmī* and *arūpa-bhūmī*), in their entirety, and *dhammas* in the fourth *bhūmī* that are designation, a *kiriya* and/or that which do not abide according to power (*avasavattanto*)’.³²⁴ Therefore, when the commentators include *nibbāna* or *dhammas* in the fourth *bhūmī* in the words “*sabbe dhammā anattā*”, they often point out the condition of not abiding according to power (*avasavattanaṭṭhena*), which shows that all *dhammas* in the four *bhūmī* are not understood as completely all *dhammas*.³²⁵ The commentarial references, which say that all *dhammas* are *anattā* refers to the four *bhūmī* and/or the Four Noble Truths or *nibbāna* without any condition attached, for example, not abiding according to power (*avasa-vattanaṭṭhena*), are very few. There are no conditions attached to these references because the commentators have already stated the condition many times previously.³²⁶ For these references, the condition of not abiding according to power (*avasavattanaṭṭhena*), although omitted, is always implied.

³²⁴ p. 5.

³²⁵ p. 5

³²⁶ pp. 5-6.

This idea of *dhammas* in the fourth *bhūmī* that is a *kiriyā* and that does not abide according to power (*avasavattanto*) is elaborated in chapter 8, which argues that even *dhammas* in the fourth *bhūmi*, namely, the penetration of the Four Noble Truths, is *anattā*. All the Four Truths are said to be penetrated by one *ñāṇa* by a number of conditions, one being by being *anattā*. This means that only the actual state of penetrating the Four Truths is *anattā*. However, each of the Four Truths has its own characteristics. Suffering, the origin of suffering and path leading to the cessation of suffering, i.e. the first, second and fourth truths, have the characteristics of the *sankhata*, whereas the cessation of suffering, the third truth, has the characteristics of the *asankhata*. *Nirodha-sacca* that is unconditioned is equated with *nirodha-dhātu* or *nibbāna-dhātu*, which is *attā*. But when the text says that *nirodha-sacca* is penetrated as *anattā*, it refers to the actual state of cessation of suffering and of the penetration of *nirodha-sacca*, which are *kiriyā* (motion) or state.

Thus a state that brings about enlightenment, i.e. the state of extinguishing of ignorance, defilements, craving, clinging etc., is still a state which arises and falls, therefore, is *anattā*, but the actual enlightenment itself is not *anattā*. The book gives an analogy of this state as a state of an appearance of light, which destroys darkness. Only the state of illumination, which soon extinguishes, is *anattā*, but the source of light does not extinguish with the state, therefore, is not *anattā*.³²⁷ The argument in this chapter seems to be that one should not easily come to the conclusion that *anattā* refers to all *dhammas* in the fourth *bhūmi* for, as the authors will argue, *anattā* has a much subtler boundary than what the proponents of the *anattā* perspective assume.

³²⁷ p. 198.

The authors argue that the nature of *anattā* does not include *nibbāna-dhātu*. This is the reason why there is no statement by the Buddha that *nibbāna-dhātu*, the *paramattha-dhamma*, is *anattā*.³²⁸ This is supported by the principle of the inseparability of the three characteristics and the principle of the opposite characteristics of the conditioned and the unconditioned as explained above.

Back to the present chapter, the authors go on to explain that the statement that “all *dhammas* are *anattā*”, is like the statement “all living beings fear punishment and fear death”, for it must be explained further that all living beings fear punishment and death except, for example, the high-born lion, the high-born elephant, the high-born horse, the high-born ox, the high-born person, an *arahat*, an *anāgāmī* and *brahma*.³²⁹ Therefore, the word “*sabba*” is divided into two types: 1. *anavasesa-sabba*, which embraces all *dhammas* in the three *bhūmi*, *kāmāvacara-bhūmi*, *rūpavacara-bhūmi* and *arūpavacara-bhūmi*, without exception; and 2. *sāvasesa-sabba*, which embraces most *dhammas* in the four *bhūmi*, *kāmāvacara-bhūmi*, *rūpavacara-bhūmi*, *arūpavacara-bhūmi* and *loguttara-bhūmi*, but not all, that is, except *nibbāna-dhātu*.³³⁰

Dhammāramaṇas that are *saṅkhata-dhammas*, for example, the five aggregates, are *anattā* and are included in the words “*sabbe dhammā anattā*”.

Monks, *rūpa ... dhammāramaṇa* are *anattā*.
The causes and conditions for the arising of
dhammāramaṇa are *anattā*. As *rūpa ...*
dhammāramaṇa have originated from what is
anattā, how could it be *attā*.³³¹

³²⁸ p. 6.

³²⁹ pp. 77-78.

³³⁰ p. 78.

³³¹ *rūpa ... pe ... dhammā bhikkhave anattā, rūpa ... pe ... dhammā anattā yopi hetu yopi paccayo dhammānaṃ uppādāya sopi anattā, anattasambhūtā bhikkhave dhammā kuto attā bhavissanti* (S IV 131).

Having said this, the Buddha concludes, “So seeing, the well-taught *ariya* feels aversion from *rūpa* etc. even from *dhammā rammaṇa*. When he feels aversion, he abandons desire, when he abandons desire, he is released. When released, he has the *ñāṇa* that knows: “Rebirth is destroyed, lived is the righteous life, done is my task, for life in this condition there is not hereafter.” From this statement, the book concludes that the seeing of *anattā* in all *saṅkhata-dhammas* is enough, for it enables the examiner to attain the destruction of *āsava*.³³² It is therefore unnecessary and false to see *nibbāna* as *anattā*.

The next point in this section is headed “*paññatti-dhamma* (designation *dhamma*) that is *nibbāna* “is *anattā*”, but does not include *nibbāna* in the *paramattha*.³³³

There are two kinds of *paññatti*: 1. *attha-paññatti*, meaning or content and characteristic of an object, an article, an account or a *paramattha* state that are knowable; and 2. *sadda-paññatti*, sound or spoken words that communicate a narrative, an object, an account and a *paramattha* state in various ways.³³⁴ Only *paramattha dhamma* exists, the rest, which are mere concepts or *paññatti* do not exist. All *paññatti-dhammas* are said to be *anattā*, including *paññatti* of *nibbāna*. The following quotation, as I mentioned above, has two versions of translation, one version is taken by Payutto to support his perspective, and this version supports this understanding of *paññatti-dhamma* as clearly seen below that the words ‘that is’ are also grammatically possible as well and the word ‘and’:

*aniccā sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhānattā ca
saṅkhatā nibbānañ c’ eva paññatti anattā
iti nicchayā*

³³² p. 80.

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Ibid.

All *saṅkhāras* that are conditioned, are impermanent, suffering and *anattā*, and *paññatti* that is *nibbāna* are considered to be *anattā*.³³⁵

The authors explain that in the words “*sabbe dhammā anattā*”, the reason why the Buddha uses the word “*dhammā*” instead of the word “*sakhārā*” is because he wishes to include *paññatti-dhammas* as well as *saṅkhāra-dhammas*.

On the occasions of *attā* the Blessed One does not say the word, *saṅkhāraṃ*, but says *dhammaṃ* to gather *dhammas* that are *paññatti*, for example, *kaṣiṇapaññatti*. As the *dhammasaṅgā-hakācāriya* states:

All *saṅkhāras* that are conditioned, are impermanent, suffering and *anattā*, and *paññatti* that is *nibbāna* is considered to be *anattā*.³³⁶

Paññatti can also be divided into two types according to the object that is being named: *avijjamāna-paññatti*, which is *paññatti* of things that do not exist in the ultimate sense, for example, the words person, man, woman etc.; and *vijjamāna-paññatti*, which is *paññatti* of things that exist in the ultimate sense, for example, *rūpa*, *vedanā*, *nirodha*, *nibbāna* etc.³³⁷ For *paññatti* is not a state and lacks the characteristics of arising and passing away, it is stated as

³³⁵ Vin V 86. The book lists four versions of the same translation: 1. The Thai Tipiṭaka (memorial of the 25th Buddhist century celebration copy) 1957; 2. The Thai Tipiṭaka, official copy, Department of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Education, 1971; 3. The Official Thai Tipiṭaka, Department of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Education, 1978; and The Vinaya Piṭaka, 8, Parivāra and Aṭṭhakathā, Mahamakutratwitthayalai, 1982.

³³⁶ *attavāre kaṣiṇādipaṇṇattisaṅgahaṇattham saṅkhāraṇaṃ ti avatvā dhammaṇaṃ ti vuttaṃ. yatthāha parivāre anicca sabbe saṅkhārā, dukkhānattā ca saṅkhatā; nibbānaṃ c’eva paññatti, anattā itī nicchayā ti* (Sv-ṭī (Be) II 159).

³³⁷ p. 83.

only *anattā*. *Paññatti* of *nibbāna* is *vijjamāna-paññatti*, and as *asaṅkhata-dhamma*, it is also *asaṅkhata-paññatti*; this is why it is stated that *nibbāna* and *paññatti* are equal in being *asaṅkhata-dhamma*.³³⁸

For that reason, even this *paññatti* is remarked together with *nibbāna* that is an object (an object of goodness that truly exists in the *paramattha* state) that “(*paññatti* that is *nibbāna*) is decided to “be *anattā*” because *nibbāna* and *paññatti* are equal in being *asaṅkhata-dhamma*.³³⁹

Therefore, there is no place in the Tipiṭaka, the Aṭṭhakathā or the āṅkā, which states that *nibbāna* in the *paramattha*, not *nibbāna* as *paññatti*, is *anattā*.³⁴⁰

According to the understanding of the authors, then, *paramattha dhammas*, which are states that exist in the ultimate, the principle of the inseparability of the three characteristics apply without exception. Whereas designated concepts, which do not exist in the ultimate, the principle of the inseparability of the three characteristics does not apply, they have only the characteristic of *anattā*.

Again the authors cite Payutto directing their arguments against him. Payutto’s words are cited along with the *Sutta* to point out that what Payutto claims in *Buddha-dhamma* and *Nibbāna-Anattā* is contradictory to the words of the Buddha in the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta* and the *Arahatta Sutta*, which according to the authors state the principle of the inseparability of the three characteristics.

³³⁸ p. 83.

³³⁹ *tasmā ayaṃ paññattipi asaṅkhattasāmaññato vatthubhūtena nibbānena saha anattā itī nicchayā ti vuttā* (Vmv (Se) II 257). The words in parentheses are the authors’.

³⁴⁰ p. 86.

In any case, although what is impermanent, is suffering and what is suffering is *anattā*, what is *anattā* is not always impermanent and not always suffering. That is, all *saṅkhāras* or *saṅkhata-dhammas* are impermanent, all *saṅkhāras* or *saṅkhata-dhammas* must be suffering and *anattā*, but all *dhammas*, both *saṅkhata-dhammas* and *asaṅkhata-dhamma* or both *saṅkhāras* and *visaṅkhāra* even though are *anattā*, they are not always impermanent and suffering. This means that *asaṅkhata-dhamma* or *visaṅkhāra* (*nibbāna*), even though is *anattā*, it is beyond impermanence and suffering in this respect. The explanation regarding the three characteristics, as stated so far, which have the meaning of oneness, of differing sides of the same subject, is directed at *saṅkhāras* or *saṅkhata-dhammas*. However the *anattā* of *visaṅkhāra* or *asaṅkhata-dhamma*, is a matter which must be clarified further.³⁴¹

It is contradictory because the Buddha does not give an exception to this principle that what is *anattā* is not always impermanent and suffering.³⁴² Furthermore, it is contradicting Buddha's statement in the *Anatta-lakkhaṇa Sutta*, which shows what is *attā* must have the characteristics of not become sick.³⁴³

The book warns against contradicting the words of the Buddha for it may cause *dhammavinaya* of the Buddha to become tainted,

³⁴¹ Phra Thepwehi [Prayut Payutto], *Buddhadhamma*, p. 70.

³⁴² p. 90.

³⁴³ p. 90.

then, it adds ‘for, in truth, this writer is still confused and has not clearly understood, so has expressed that “However, the *anattā* of *visaṅkhāra* or *asaṅkhata-dhamma*, is a matter which must be clarified further”’.³⁴⁴ The authors here I see as reversing Payutto’s charge of the Dhammakāya Foundation on to himself. Perhaps this reversal is intentional for the authors should be, I assume, familiar with *Dhammakāya Case*. This statement, state the authors, taking *sāṅkhata-dhammas* and *asaṅkhata-dhamma* and explaining that they both do not abide according to power is also incorrect.³⁴⁵

For all (both *sāṅkhāras* and *asaṅkhāra*) are states which stand or occur in their normal nature without someone to control them or wish them according to own desire.³⁴⁶

It is incorrect because it contradicts the *Vibhaṅga Aṭṭhakathā*’s explanation that the meaning of not abide according to power is specific to only *sāṅkhata-dhammas*.³⁴⁷

Moreover it is named *anattā* because of the meaning not abiding according to power. Or because of the reason that the state that does not abide according to power, cannot occur to anybody within these three conditions, namely, “let body that arises become lasting, let body that is lasting not age, let body that ages not perish”, (body, for example,) is therefore void (*suññam*) of this condition of abiding according to power, because of the lack of owner and because of opposing *attā*. All *dhammas* are named *anattā* for these four reasons.

³⁴⁴ p. 90.

³⁴⁵ p. 90.

³⁴⁶ Phra Dhammapīṭaka (Prayut Payutto), *Nibbāna-Anattā*, p. 98.

³⁴⁷ p. 91.

Then the authors correct Payutto's statement:

For all *dhammas* that are conditioned (*saṅkhāra-dhammas*) are states that stand or occur in their normal nature, void of *attā* that is *sammuti paññatti*, namely, 'animal', 'person' or 'doer' 'creator', 'experiencer' etc., and so one cannot force them or ask them to follow one's own desire; and for all *dhammas* depend on causes and conditions, they therefore arise and pass away naturally. All *dhammas* are therefore called *anattā* because they do not abide according to power. Whereas *dhamma* that is without causes and conditions (*visaṅkhāra*) has the state of permanence (*niccaṃ, dhuvam, sassataṃ*) and supreme happiness (*paramaṃ sukhaṃ*), so is *attā*, because it does not tend to sickness (the word "*ābādha*" means *dukkha-lakkhaṇa*, which is the characteristic opposite of happiness), and because it is not void of *dhamma* that has the essence of being *attā*".³⁴⁸

This is done similarly to the way Payutto corrects Thanawuttho's article in *Dhammakāya Case*. It is also interesting to see that the authors view the word 'person' as a conventional designation, which is the standpoint of Theravāda Buddhism against Puggalavāda as expressed in the *Kathāvatthu*. This previous quote by the authors echoes the verse from the *Puggalakathā*; one that was cited by Payutto in *Dhammakāya Case*. It is clear to me that the objective of the authors in writing this book, as has been said previ-

³⁴⁸ p. 92.

ously, is that they are arguing within the authority of the Pāli canon. They are not trying to argue against it or question its authority, but are in fact pointing out how these texts are to be interpreted.

The next point argues from the point of view of practice. During insight meditation all *dhammas* are *anattā* is considered together to encourage an insight endowed with aversion to the five aggregates.³⁴⁹ At *nibbidā-ñāṇa*, *gotrabhūñāṇa* (*ñāṇa* of one who is between the state of the worldly and that of the noble one) is not yet reached and *nibbāna* is not yet the object of *vipassanā*; only *saṅkhata-dhammas*, namely, the 5 aggregates, the 12 *āyatana* and the 18 *dhātu* are the objects.³⁵⁰

All *saṅkhāras* are impermanent, when one considers this with wisdom, then one becomes dispassionate in suffering. This is the path to purity.

All *saṅkhāras* are suffering, when one considers this with wisdom, then one becomes dispassionate in suffering. This is the path to purity.

All *dhammas* are *anattā*, when one considers this with wisdom, then, one becomes dispassionate in suffering. This is the path to purity.³⁵¹

³⁴⁹ p. 92.

³⁵⁰ p. 93.

³⁵¹ *sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā ti yadā paññāya passati atha nibbindati dukkhe esa maggo visuddhiyā sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā ti yadā paññāya passati atha nibbindati dukkhe esa maggo visuddhiyā sabbe dhammā anattā ti yadā paññāya passati atha nibbindati dukkhe esa maggo visuddhiyā* (Dhp 277-280).

This shows that these words of the Buddha, argue the authors, are directed at practitioners during the examination of *saṅkhāras*, namely, the five aggregates in order for the practitioners to become dispassionate.³⁵² They are directed at ordinary persons who have not entered the stream of *nibbāna*.³⁵³

Dhammaṭṭhiti-ñāṇa, during which the insight endowed with aversion occurs, comes before *ñāṇa* in *nibbāna*, where *nibbāna* is an object of meditation.

Susima, whether or not you understand, first comes *dhammaṭṭhiti-ñāṇa* afterwards *ñāṇa* in *nibbāna*.

What do you think, Susima, is *rūpa* permanent or impermanent? Impermanent, Lord.

Is what is impermanent suffering or happiness? Suffering, Lord.

Is what is impermanent, suffering and subject to change fit to be regarded as ‘This is mine, this I am, this is my self’? No, Lord.

(Same with *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra* and *viññāṇa*)³⁵⁴

³⁵² p. 94.

³⁵³ p. 94.

³⁵⁴ *ājāneyyāsi vā susima na vā tvaṃ ājāneyyāsi atha kho dhammaṭṭhitiñāṇaṃ pubbe pacchā nibbāne ñāṇaṃ. taṃ kiṃ maññasi susima rūpaṃ niccaṃ vā aniccaṃ vā ti. aniccaṃ bhante. yaṃ panāniccaṃ dukkhaṃ vā taṃ sukhaṃ vā ti. dukkhaṃ bhante. yaṃ panāniccaṃ dukkhaṃ vipariṇāmadhammaṃ kallaṃ nu taṃ samanupassituṃ etaṃ mama esohamasmi eso me attā ti. no hetuṃ bhante. vedanā ... saññā ... saṅkhāra ... viññāṇaṃ (S II 124 -5).*

Therefore, according to the authors, it is clear that *dhammaṭṭhiti-ñāṇa*, during which one contemplates *sabbe dhammā anattā* is separate from *ñāṇa* in *nibbāna*.³⁵⁵ Therefore, argue the authors, all *dhammas* cannot refer to *nibbāna*.

The next section is headed ‘The Meanings of the Words “*Anattā*” and “*Attā*”’. This seems to be an additional section as the arguments do not follow the former arguments like the previous sections of this chapter, but is concerned with the implication of the definition of *anattā*. The authors argue that if there is a state that is not *attā*, the state that is *attā* must exist for without the state that is *attā*, the Buddha cannot compare it with its opposite state.³⁵⁶ This is similar to a word like *anariyo* (not an *ariya*), for the *ariya* exists, but the person who is an *anariyo* is not an *ariya*.³⁵⁷ Thus, the word *anattā* does not mean that there is no *attā* in all respects.

3.2.3 Chapter 6: the meaning of *attā*

This chapter is headed ‘The Meaning of *Attā*’. It is divided into three sections and can be summarized as follows. The first section gives the definitions and the explanations of the term *attā*. The second section describes the two kinds of *attā*: *attā-lokiya*, the false *attā* and the conventional *attā*, and supramundane *attā*, which has the characteristic of *asaṅkhata-dhamma*. The third and the longest section, states the principle of the characteristics of the unconditioned self. The Buddha has shown the characteristic of *attā* in the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta* that it does not tend to sickness. This supramundane *attā* that does not tend to sickness is the characteristic of *nibbāna* together with permanence and happiness. The Buddha fur-

³⁵⁵ p. 97.

³⁵⁶ p. 98.

³⁵⁷ p. 98.

ther states that one should take *attā* as refuge and shelter. *Attā*, in this sense, means worldly *dhammas* and nine supramundane *dhammas*. *Attā* is also described as an island of refuge, the place beyond and *dhamma* in the ultimate within. When the phrase ‘void of *attā*’ is used to refer to *dhammas* in the ultimate and the Four Noble Truths, it means they are void of the conventional *attā*. Similarly with the statement that the Buddha neither states *attā* in the present nor in the future, it means that the Buddha does not state the conventional *attā* in the present and in the future and does not mean that he denies *attā* in all respects.

The word *attā* has four meanings: 1. *citta*, 2. *kāya*, 3. *paramattha* or *paramātman*, and 4. the state of *dhamma* in the *paramattha*.³⁵⁸

Attā in Buddhism, argue the authors, is divided into two kinds, namely, *attā-lokiya* (worldly self) and *attā-lokuttara* (supramundane self). *Attā-lokiya* is divided further into two characteristics. The first characteristic of *attā-lokiya* is the false *attā*: the ordinary person wrongly sees the five aggregates as having the characteristics of permanence, happiness and *attā*, which is a false understanding from the true state.³⁵⁹ The second one is *sammuti attā*, the conventional *attā* that the ordinary person or someone outside Buddhism believes to be a person who is a creator, an experiencer etc., is only a *sammuti paññatti* (conventional designation), and does not have the substance and essence of being real *attā*.³⁶⁰ *Attā-lokuttara* in Buddhism means *asaṅkhata-dhamma* that has the state of permanence, happiness and *attā*, and has the characteristics of substance and the essence in being *attā*, which are the opposite characteristics to the characteristics of *anattā*.³⁶¹ This section clearly shows the authors’ understand-

³⁵⁸ p. 104.

³⁵⁹ p. 104.

³⁶⁰ p. 104.

³⁶¹ p. 104.

ing of the different kinds of *attā*. The two characteristics of *attā* are an important position, which is found in the arguments of all proponents of the *attā* perspective for they allow for the interpretation that the references in the commentaries negating *attā* in *nibbāna* refer only to the first kind of *attā*.

The third section is headed ‘The Principle of Examination of the Characteristic of (real) *Attā* in the *Paramattha*’. It is an important section of the book, which states the principle of the characteristics of the unconditioned self and is connected to the principle of the inseparability of the three characteristics in the previous chapter.

The authors start off by arguing that one must be able to distinguish between references to ultimate *attā* as opposed to the conventional *attā* in the scripture. For ultimate *dhammas* can only be *attā* as opposed to any kind of conventional or designated *dhamma*, which do not exist, cannot have this characteristic. The first point argues that in the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta*, the Buddha takes the five aggregates, which are *lokiya-dhammas* in the *paramattha*, in order to define that characteristic of *attā* that “if the five aggregates were *attā*, they would not tend to sickness”.³⁶²

This means that the *attā* described here implies permanence and happiness, the characteristics of the unconditioned. Therefore, in the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta*, *attā* fills in the missing third characteristic of *nibbāna*.

The author argues that as five aggregates which are worldly *dhammas* in the ultimate sense are taken in this passage to provide an example of what is not *attā*, then the *attā* that is mentioned in this passage must also refer to *attā* in the ultimate sense as ultimate

³⁶² p. 106. Vin I 13.

dhammas are compared with ultimate *dhammas*, they are not compared in this way with conventional or designated *dhammas* because ultimate and conventional *dhammas* refer to different levels of language.

The following passage also refers to *attā* in the ultimate. This is supported by an explanation by the commentaries that *attā* is the worldly and supramundane *dhammas*.³⁶³

*attadīpā bhikkhave viharatha
attasaraṇā anaññasaraṇā dhammadīpā
dhammasaraṇā anaññasaraṇā.*

Monks, you must be ones who have *attā* as refuge, *attā* as shelter, nothing else as shelter. You must be ones who have Dhamma as refuge, Dhamma as shelter, nothing else as shelter.³⁶⁴

What is called *attā* in the words *attadīpa*, for example? *Lokiya-dhammas* and *lokuttara-dhammas* (are called *attā*).³⁶⁵

Furthermore, *attā* is also the nine supramundane *dhammas*, one of which is *nibbāna*. The word island here is synonymous with *nibbāna*.

In the word *attā* of the phrase *atta-dīpā*, the Lord refers to *dhammas*. With regard to this context, which the Buddha has previously

³⁶³ p. 107.

³⁶⁴ D III 77.

³⁶⁵ *ko panettha attā nāma? lokiyalokuttaradhammo* (Sv III 846; Spk II 268). The words in parentheses are the authors'.

stated, it is known that (it is) the nine kinds of *lokuttara-dhammas*. This is because the nine kinds of *lokuttara-dhammas*, the Buddha calls them island (= *nibbāna*), for they are not flooded by the four waters (namely the waters of *kāma*, *bhāva*, *diṭṭhi* and *avijjā*).³⁶⁶

The *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī* explains similarly:

The word *atta-dīpā* means all of you should make *attā* as refuge (that is *nibbāna* which is a refuge like an island) like a person in the middle of a great ocean making an island as refuge. The word *atta-saraṇā* means let *attā* be *gati* (destiny) and let nothing else be *gati*. Even in the phrase *dhamma-dīpā* and *dhamma-saraṇā*, the sense is the same. Moreover, know that the word Dhamma refers to the nine kinds of *lokuttara-dhammas*.³⁶⁷

This passage from the *āṅkā Kālīnatthappakāsanā* argues similarly adding that *attā* is the ultimate *dhamma* within:

It is called *dīpo* (island) because of the meaning of a place that has water in two parts, namely, an area that is surrounded by water and is not flooded. But in this case, *attā* which is referred as *dīpo* (island) is *attā* that is not

³⁶⁶ *attadīpā ti ettha attasaddena dhammo eva vutto, svāyam attho heṭṭhā vibhāvito eva. navavidho lokuttaradhammo veditabbo. so hi catūhi oghehi anajjhotthanīyato dīpo ti vutto* (Spk-p! (Se) 375). The words in parentheses are the authors'.

³⁶⁷ *attadīpā ti mahāsamuddagatā dīpaṃ viya attānaṃ dīpaṃ patiṭṭhaṃ katvā viharatha. attasaraṇā ti attagatikā hotha, mā aññāgatikā. dhammadīpadhammasaraṇapadesupi eseva nayo. ettha ca dhammo ti navavidho lokuttaradhammo veditabbo* (Spk III 204). The words in parentheses are the authors'.

flooded by even the four kinds of waters or the great water of *saṃsāra*. For this reason, the Lord says for example the word *mahāsamud-dagatā*. The word *atta-saraṇā* means having *attā* as a specific recollection. The word *atta-gatikā vā* means having a self as a destiny. The word *mā aññagatikā* means those of you do not think of any other destiny to recollect as a place beyond. Why? Because in the word *atta-dīpā*, *dhamma* in the *paramattha* named *attā* means *dhamma* that exists within. *Dhamma* in the *paramattha* that is *attā*, that those of you should realize, is called an island, a refuge, a destiny, a place beyond. For these reasons the Buddha states “*dhammadīpā*”, for example.³⁶⁸

The word *attā*, argue the authors, is used to mean *nibbāna* in the sense of refuge.

Attā is refuge for those people, for this reason those people are said to have refuge that is *attā*.³⁶⁹

The purpose of this chapter is not only to point out the principle of the characteristics of the unconditioned self, it is also to point out the method by which to distinguish between important passages from the scripture, which refer to *attā* in the ultimate sense,

³⁶⁸ *dvhi bhāgehi āpo gato etthā ti dīpo, oghena parigato hutvā anajjhotthaṇṇo bhūmibhāgo, idha pana catūhipi oghehi, saṃsāramahogheneva vā anajjhotthaṇṇo attā dīpo ti adhippeto. tenā ha mahāsamuddagatā ti ādi. attasaraṇā ti attappaṭisaraṇā. attagatikā vāti attaparāyaṇā va. mā aññagatikā ti aññamañ kiñci gatiṃ paṭisaraṇaṃ parāyaṇaṃ mā cintayittha. kasmā? attā nāmettha paramatthato dhammo abbhantaraṭṭhena, so evaṃ saṃpādīto tumhākhaṃ dīpaṃ tānaṃ gati parāyaṇanti. tena vuttaṃ dhammadīpā ti ādi (Sv-pṭ II 188).*

³⁶⁹ *attā dīpo patiṭṭhā etesanti attadīpā (Sv-p (Se) III 24; Spk-pṭ (Se) II 219).*

and important passages, which refer to *attā* in the conventional sense. The above passages are examples of *attā* in the ultimate. These can be identified by the words: stability, lack of change, not tending to sickness, being a refuge, a destiny, a recollection and *dhamma* in the *paramattha* within. However, the passages cited below refer to *attā* in the conventional sense, as identified by the words: doer, experiencer, extinguisher, proceeder and person.

Thus when the Aṭṭhakathā states that the Four Noble Truths are “void because there is no experiencer, no doer, no extinguisher and no proceeder”, it means that they are void of a person that is the conventional *attā*.

Moreover, in the *paramattha*, all these Truths are known as void (empty) for there is no experiencer, no doer, no extinguisher and no proceeder. For this reason, it is said:

“In truth, there is only suffering, but there are none who suffer.

There is *kiriyā* (action), but there is no doer.

There is cessation (*nibbāna*), but there is no one who ceases.

There is *magga* (path), but there is no one who proceeds.”³⁷⁰

³⁷⁰ *sabbāneva panetāni saccāni paramatthena vedakakāraṇanibbutagamakābhāvato suññānī ti veditabbāni. tenetaṃ vuccati dukkhameva hi na koci dukkhito kāraṇo na kiriyāva vijjati, atthi nibbuti na nibbuto pumā maggamatthi gamako na viññatī ti* (Paṭis-a I 196). The words in parentheses are the authors’.

The next point concerns an important quote from the *Kathāvatthu*, a dialogue that is often taken by the proponents of the *anattā* perspective in support of their position. The authors clarify the understanding of this.

Sakavādī: You are able to see a person in the *sacchikattha-paramattha* (in the true state)?

Paravādī: Yes.

Sakavādī: The Buddha normally states true words, states at the right time, states matters that are true, states correctly, does not state falsely, does not state error, does he not?

Paravādī: Yes.

Sakavādī: The Buddha has stated “Seniya, three types of religious leaders appears in the world ... the three types of religious leaders are:

Religious leaders who decree *attā* in the truth and in the real, in the present and in the future, these are called “*sassatavāda*” (those who hold falsely that the world is permanent).

Religious leaders who decree *attā* in the truth and in the real, only in the present, but do not decree it in the future, these are called “*ucchedavāda*” (one who holds falsely to annihilation).

Religious leaders who do not decree *attā* in the truth or in the real, both in the present and in the future, these are called “*sammā-sambuddha*”.

Seniya, the three types of religious leaders appear in the world thus. Does this *Sutta* truly exist or not?

Paravādī: Yes, it does.

Sakavādī: Then, you did not say “you see a person in the *sacchikattha-paramattha*”.³⁷¹

The authors explain that the Buddha, in refuting *attā* in the present and the future in the truth and the real, refers to *attā* that the world or other religious schools designate.³⁷² This is identified by the word person.

3.2.4 Chapter 7: consideration

The seventh chapter is called ‘Consideration’. It is the longest chapter of the book. It consists of nine points followed by a section of conclusion. The purpose of this chapter is to bring in details from the previous six chapters to provide further consideration and to strengthen the arguments of the perspective. There seem to be two main points argued by the supporters of the *anattā* perspective that this chapter aims at refuting. One is a statement of a monk from a later period found in the Vinaya: “*aniccā sabbe saṅkhārā*

³⁷¹ Kv 68.

³⁷² p. 121.

dukkhānattā ca saṅkhatā nibbānañ c' eva pañṇatti anattā iti nicchayā ti”,³⁷³ one version of translation, of which, has been interpreted to mean that *nibbāna* is *anattā*. The second is the argument that those who see that *nibbāna* is *attā* in the *paramattha* fall prey to the view of *sassata-diṭṭhi*. A big part of this chapter is also a warning against the holding of the *uccheda-diṭṭhi*.

At the beginning of the chapter the authors argue that the people, who use the reference from the *Parivāra* of the *Vinaya*, which says that “*Pañṇatti* that is *nibbāna*, the venerable decides to be *anattā*”, to support their own opinion that *nibbāna* is *anattā*, has taken the lowest level of evidence, which is a personal opinion of a monk (*atta-nomati*), and have overlooked the most important evidence, namely the words of the Buddha in the *suttas*.³⁷⁴ Furthermore, there is no evidence, which states that those who say the *nibbāna* is permanent, perpetual, supremely happy and has the state of *attā* (in the *paramattha*) are *sassata-vādin*.³⁷⁵ This is because *sassata-vādin* normally decrees permanence of only the five aggregates or states of *dhamma* that are not beyond *saṅkhata-dhammas* of the three *bhūmis*.³⁷⁶ The authors also warn that in the search for right understanding, a point of studies should be set up. Its purpose must not be to cause a dispute, disregarding others’ opinion and always pointing out their wrongs.³⁷⁷ If this is the case, then, the studies of the scripture would be like searching for poisonous snakes. The previous paragraphs give a picture of the tension caused by this debate. It is also importantly argued that the Tipiṭaka is not to be read merely as a reference book. It must be read and understood in the light of practice.

³⁷³ Vin V 86.

³⁷⁴ p. 124.

³⁷⁵ p.125.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ p. 125.

Similarly to Payutto, the authors also take the Four Great References, which are the hierarchy of all possible sources of *dhamma*, where by no evidence in the lower level can contradict evidence in a higher level, to argue their points. However, there is a slightly different understanding of the levels from Payutto's.

The first level: The *Suttas*, the words of the Buddha in Pāli in the Tipiṭaka.

The second level: The *suttānuloma*, the words of the Buddha stating in accordance with the *Suttas*.

The third level: The *ācariya-vāda*, the guideline of the Aṭṭhakathā that 500 *arahats* with Mahākassapa as chair laid down for the explanation and the elaboration of the words of the Buddha.

The fourth level: The *attanomati*, the personal opinion and the theravāda from the Aṭṭhakathā of the *Suttas*. The Abhidhamma and the Vinaya that are the opinions of the *aṭṭhakathācāriya* are counted as an *atta-nomati* also. It is considered as the last level of conviction.³⁷⁸

It is interesting to see that the words of the Buddha although not in the *Sutta* is considered as the second level of sources, and even in the Tipiṭaka itself, if the words are not regarded as the Buddha's and if it is not by a community of monks, it is considered as an *attanomati*. The authors, then, are able to argue that the controversial passage in the *Parivāra* is an *attanomati*. Then, the authors argue that what the Buddha states in the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta* and in the *Attadīpa Sutta* are classed as the first order of evidence, therefore, no lower source can contradict them.³⁷⁹ If there are evidences

³⁷⁸ p. 126.

³⁷⁹ p. 127.

in the lower levels which contradict these *suttas*, no matter how many there are, they are to be dismissed.³⁸⁰

The *Parivāra Vinaya* passage, no matter how it is translated, is only a personal opinion of monk in a later period and cannot contradict the words of the Buddha.

*aniccā sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhānattā ca
saṅkhatā nibbānañ c' eva paññatti anattā
iti nicchayā ti.*

All *saṅkhāras* that are conditioned, impermanent, suffering and *anattā*, and *paññatti* that is *nibbāna*, the venerable considers it as *anattā*.³⁸¹

The statement is pointing out that when *nibbāna* is merely a designation, it is *anattā*. This translation (in Thai) appears in various versions of the Vinaya:

1. The Thai Tipiṭaka (memorial of the 25th Buddhist century celebration edition) 1957;
2. The Thai Tipiṭaka, official edition, Department of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Education, 1971;
3. The Official Thai Tipiṭaka, Department of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Education, 1978;
4. The Vinaya Piṭaka, 8, Parivāra and Aṭṭhakathā, Mahamakutaraja-vidyalaya, 1982.

However, the second translation, the word 'is' has been changed to 'and' to fit in with the opinion of the translator:³⁸²

³⁸⁰ p. 127.

³⁸¹ Vin V 86.

³⁸² p. 136.

1. The Thai Tipiṭaka, the Saṅgayānā version, 1987;
2. The Thai Tipiṭaka, printed by Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya, 1996.

This suggests which side held the dominant position regarding *nibbāna* in Thai academic Buddhism over the last twenty years or so. The authors go on to say that although this statement may appear in the Tipiṭaka, there is evidence that this was written by a monk in Lanka at the time of the fifth council, probably written four hundred years after the *ācariya-vāda* – the guideline of the Aṭṭhakathā laid down by the five hundred *arahants*.³⁸³ Therefore, this evidence should be classed as an *attanomati*.

The next part of the book describes the cause and the consequence of holding the *uccheda-diṭṭhi*. *Uccheda-diṭṭhi* can be caused by *vipassanā* that is weak in strength and cannot get rid of all *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*, the clinging on to the five aggregates as self. When a weak *vipassanā* examines what is *anattā*, it does not see that only *saṅkhata-dhammas* that are conditioned, with *avijjā* as cause, that occurs in accordance with the process of *dhamma*, is *anattā*, but it can wrongly see that all *dhammas*, both *saṅkhata* and *asaṅkhata*, are *anattā*, causing an *uccheda-diṭṭhi* to arise.³⁸⁴ The consequence of holding this view is grave. The next point concerns the view *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*, the seeing of self in the five aggregates. It is expressed that it brings much harm to those who hold it, but not as much harm as the *uccheda-diṭṭhi*. The abandonment of *sakkāya-diṭṭhi* ends with the five aggregates.

A monk asks: Lord, how does *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*
come to be?

³⁸³ p. 137.

³⁸⁴ p. 151.

The Buddha answers: Monk, an *ariya* who has heard this *dhamma-vinaya* ... does not regard *rūpa* as *attā*, or *attā* as possessed of *rūpa*, or *rūpa* as in *attā* or *attā* as in *rūpa* (*vedanā* ... *saññā* ... *saṅkhāra* ... *viññāṇa*). Monk, that is how *sakkāya-ditṭhi* does not come to be.³⁸⁵

Chapter eight is called ‘the realization of the four truths by the nature of *anattā*’, which argues that the state that brings about enlightenment, i.e. the state of extinguishing of ignorance, defilements, craving, clinging etc., is still a state which arises and fall, therefore, is *anattā*, but the actual enlightenment itself is not *anattā*. As the argument of chapter eight has already been stated above within the content of chapter five and as there is a word limit to this thesis, I shall omit it.

Chapter nine is called ‘*dhammakāya* is the body attained in *Dhamma* of the *tathāgata-sammāsambuddha*, the *paccekabuddha* and the *arahats*’, which through various references equates *dhammakāya* with *nibbāna-dhātu*, which has the characteristic of *attā*. It can be summarized that *dhammakāya* means the qualities of the Buddha, the *arhants* and the *ariyas*. The qualities are four *magga*, four *phala* and *nibbāna-dhātu*. *Dhammakāya* is the qualities they have attained. However, *dhammakāya* does not only mean qualities, but also means an actual ‘body’. The authors argue that the paths, fruits and *nibbāna* are not only attainment of knowledge or insight, but they are attainments of a body – the *dhammakāya* – that is to be seen and become. The Buddha not only attained insight to the *dhammakāya*, but they also saw and became the *dhammakāya* i.e. he not only understood, but also saw and became ‘*magga*’, ‘*phala*’

³⁸⁵ M III 18.

and ‘*nibbāna-dhātu*’. The seeing of *magga*, *phala* and *nibbāna-dhātu* is the seeing of *dhammakāya*, which appears as a body. *Dhammakāya* is equated with the holder of the state of *nibbāna*, the *nibbāna-dhātu*. Being *nibbāna-dhātu* is being the owner, the *attā*, but as owner without clinging, a state, which stands and does not pass away or change. From all the evidences, the authors conclude that *nibbāna-dhātu* that has the substance and the essence in being the real *lokuttara* self is the *dhammakāya* that has attained *arahatta-phala* of the Buddha, the *pacceka-buddha* and the *arahat*, a conclusion based on meditation method of Luang Pho Wat Paknam.³⁸⁶ As this chapter does not directly concern the topic of this thesis, it shall be omitted.

³⁸⁶ p. 210.

IV COMMENTARY

Now that I have described the two perspectives, the final chapter of this thesis is the commentarial part, in which I shall make several comments regarding general questions that are raised by this debate, for example, whether one can detect any patterns in the background of those who advocated one particular side. Are there others who just keep quiet? There are differences in the basic understanding of the terms *attā/anattā* and *nibbāna* between the two perspectives. If so, then, what are the results of the differences in their understanding? To what extent do the participants in the debate simply repeat the same old arguments and cite the same canonical passages? To what extent do they come up with new arguments? What is the context of this debate in the history Buddhist thought? This chapter will try to answer these questions. I shall also account for the perspective of Phra Thamwisutthimongkhon (Luang Ta Mahā Boowa māṇasampanno).

4.1 PATTERNS IN THE BACKGROUND OF THE ADVOCATORS

My study of the subject leads me to conclude that, the proponents of the *attā* perspective seem to be practice oriented and the proponents of the *anattā* perspective are known more for their writing and scholarship. Luang Pho Wat Paknam and the 12th Saṅgharāja are known more as practitioners than scholars. They are not only known by academic Buddhists in Thailand, but also by Thai people in general. Their names are associated with miracles and sacred amulets.

At present, Luang Pho Wat Paknam is one of Thailand's most venerated teachers along with figures such as Somdet To (Phromarangi of Wat Rakhang, Bangkok), Luang Pu Thuat (Wat Changhai, Pattani Province, Southern Thailand), Luang Pu Man and Luang Ta Maha Boowa. These monks are widely revered and even worshipped as people believe them to be Nobles Ones, Arahats or even Bodhisattvas. Luang Pho Wat Paknam's picture is put up in houses, shops, restaurants and offices because people believe that worshipping him will bring success in their lives. Due to the influence of temples associated with him, especially Wat Phra Thammakai, Luang Pho Wat Paknam's name is also known by Buddhists abroad.

In contrast, Buddhadāsa and Payutto, although considered as practitioners, are not usually venerated to this extent in such ways, but in Thailand are respected more by the academically inclined Buddhists than the general public and are regarded as philosophers, reformists and scholars. Outside Thailand, their fame extends to various groups of people in academic, social and religious circles most of whom read the translation of their writings and works published about them. In the case of Payutto, he is known in Thailand as a leading scholar monk. Luang Pu Man and his disciples Luang Ta

Mahaboowa and other monks who follow Luang Pu Man's forest-orientated practice quoted by the proponents of the *attā* perspective are certainly regarded as practitioners.

Phra Rajyarnvisith is known as both a researcher and practitioner, although he is more generally known as a meditation master. Phra Rajyarnvisith became famous when, in 2004, he gave a sermon on the radio on the topic of Thammaphiban, the Buddhist art of leadership, which caused a stir in the Thai Rak Thai government. The prime minister, first reacted by criticizing 'monks who talk about politics' saying that they should disrobe and enter politics instead of being monks. He later sent the chair of the House of Representatives to give Phra Rajyarnvisith a private apology. Later that year the radio recordings on Thammaphiban were compiled and published into a book.

It would, of course, be wrong to generalize that those who argue that *nibbāna* is *attā* do not study the scripture and those who argue that *nibbāna* is *anattā* do not practise. For reading the biography and works of Luang Pho Wat Paknam and the Saṅgharāja, they are educated in the Buddhist scriptures, especially the Saṅgharāja who from 1928-1931 before he became the Saṅgharāja, apart from being the monastic governor, was also in charge of the general Pāli examination nationwide. Luang Pho Wat Paknam, although more oriented to meditation, spent over ten years of his life studying the Pāli scriptures in various schools, including Wat Phra Chetuphon (Wat Pho).³⁸⁷ As for Buddhādāsa and Payutto, they both preferred more secluded kind of monasteries – one lived in Suan Mok or Garden of Liberation in rural Suratthani and the other in a modest and secluded monastery in Nakorn Pathom, Wat Yanawesakawan – and are both inclined to *vipassanā* meditation.

³⁸⁷ *Biography and Works*, p. 3.

Thus, regarding the question of whether one side tends to be more practice-based than the other and/or the other side more academic based, the answer is yes according to the opinions of these monks' followers and of the general public, the proponents of the *attā* perspective are known more as practitioners and the proponents of the *anattā* perspective are known more as scholars. However, there does not seem to be a clear separation on this, and of course it is not possible to discern the amount of practice monks have done in their lives and even more impossible when considering the factor of perfections they may have gained from many previous lives.

Regarding the question of monastic training, the Saṅgharāja, Luang Pho Wat Paknam, Phra Rajyarnvisith, Buddhādāsa and Payutto were all ordained into the Mahanikai, whereas Luang Pu Man and Luang Ta Maha Boowa who are quoted in the *attā* perspective were ordained into the Thammayut Nikai. I have detected no pattern in the monastic training of either side of the debate, but perhaps those who are ordained into the Mahanikai order are more inclined to engage in the debate or clarify the understanding on whether *nibbāna* is *attā* or *anattā* than those of the Thammayut Nikai order.

4.2 DIFFERENCES IN BASIC UNDERSTANDING

The two perspectives that I have accounted for in the second and third chapter of this thesis have very different understandings on *attā/anattā* and *nibbāna*, sometimes to the extent that it seems as if they do not understand each other's perspective at all. For the *attā* perspective, there are three basic principles in the understanding of Phuttha-thamprathip: 'the characteristics of the unconditioned self', 'the inseparability of the three characteristics', and 'the opposite characteristics of the conditioned and the unconditioned'. *Attā* meant

characteristic of a state that has the substance and essence of the true *attā*. The true *attā* is the one shown by the Buddha as the *attā* that does not become sick and is not subject to aging, pain and death. This is the *attā* that one must take as refuge and shelter with nothing else as shelter. This *attā* is what the commentaries call the *paramattha dhamma* within.

Anattā is then a state that becomes sick, that is subject to aging, pain and death, which is equal to being impermanent and suffering. For what is impermanent is suffering, what is suffering is *anattā*. These three characteristics are inseparable like the chains of three interlaced hoops, when one is lifted, the other two are also lifted as well. *Attā* and *anattā* are the characteristics of two states that are totally opposite, one being of conditioned *dhammas* and the other unconditioned *dhamma*, specifically, *nibbāna-dhātu*. For without the state that is *attā*, the Buddha cannot compare it with its opposite state. The *anattā* nature of the conditioned *dhammas* cannot be known without knowing the *attā* nature of the unconditioned.

Moreover, there are two kinds of *attā* mentioned in the scripture and the commentaries, namely, the worldly conventional *attā* and the *lokuttara, paramattha attā*. In this regard, Phutthathamprathip points out the method by which to distinguish between important passages from the scripture, which refer to *attā* in the ultimate sense, and important passages, which refer to *attā* in the conventional sense. The first *attā* is what ordinary people equate with the five aggregates along with permanence and happiness. This *attā* is also viewed by people outside Buddhism as a being, person, life, creator, doer, experiencer or possessor of own power, but is only a conventional designation. This is the *attā* that the scriptures and the commentaries deny.

The other kind of *attā*, the *lokuttara*, *paramattha attā*, is the *attā* that the scriptures and the commentaries affirm as not becoming sick and being a refuge i.e. having the state of substance and of essence, being permanent and happy, and opposes the characteristic of *anattā*. It is the unconditioned *dhamma* or *nibbāna-dhātu*. To see *nibbāna* as *attā*, one does not fall into *sakkāya-diṭṭhi* for *nibbāna* is not the cause of *sakkāya-diṭṭhi* or *upādāna*, the five aggregates are. But viewing *nibbāna* as *anattā*, one is in danger of falling into the *uccheda-diṭṭhi*, an even graver view than *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*.

For the *anattā* perspective, Payutto argues that *anattā* is the negation of the word *attā*, both the conventional *attā* and the *paramattha attā*, both the *attā* in the everyday life and the higher ‘Self or ‘Spirit’, for example, Soul, God, Brahma or *Paramātman*, everything. This higher *attā* is what is denied in the *Puggalakathā* as ‘person, being or life’. The word *anattā* merely means a negation of *attā* and does not mean there is something called *anattā* that is the opposite of *attā*. The clinging that is the opposite of *attā* is called *nirattā*, a clinging in the annihilationists’ perspective, whereas *anattā* is to do with wisdom and insight.

In order to communicate human beings agree to call things the same way. The word *attā* is designated and used in the conventional sense as a synonym for life or being, person, self, we, they etc. It communicates the aspect of separation clearly and conveys clinging. *Attā* only exists when there is clinging.

It is merely an idea caused by ignorance. This clinging ends up with the five aggregates. There is no more talk of *attā* beyond the five aggregates. When there is no clinging, one will see that there are only *dhammas*. One kind of *dhamma* is conditioned (*saṅkhāra*) or the five aggregates. The other kind is unconditioned or *nibbāna*.

Attā exists only at the conventional level, not at the ultimate level. All references to *attā* in the scriptures refer only to conventional *attā*. The scriptures directly deny that there is *attā* in the ultimate sense and state that *nibbāna* is *anattā*. Lord Buddha says all *saṅkhāras* (compounds) are impermanent and suffering, but all *dhammas* (phenomena) are *anattā*. All that is impermanent is suffering and *anattā*, but what is *anattā* is not always impermanent and suffering. To view *nibbāna* as *anattā* is not to view *nibbāna* as annihilation. It is to view *nibbāna* as *dhamma* that is unconditioned, and has no clinging, but is powerless and so is *anattā*.

For the *attā* perspective, the word *nibbāna* has three aspects. It is not only a state void of defilement, craving and suffering, but also the holder of this state, the *nibbāna-dhātu*, and the dwelling place of *nibbāna-dhātu*, the *āyatana (nibbāna)*. Without *nibbāna-dhātu* where the state of *nibbāna* is situated, the state of *nibbāna* cannot exist; like goodness, badness, suffering and happiness, without the holder of these states namely human or animal, they cannot exist. This is the reason why *nibbāna* is named *dhātu* because it is the holder of the state of *nibbāna*. This holder of the state of *nibbāna* is then equated with *dhammakāya* that is *attā*. *Dhammakāya* that is *attā* is the qualities of those at the levels of someone who is between the ordinary and the noble up to the Buddha. However, only *dhammakāya* that has attained *arahatta-phala* is equated with *nibbāna-dhātu* and is the completely *vimutti attā*. When there is a nature where the state is situated, there must be a dwelling place or *āyatana (nibbāna)*, like the world in which living beings dwell. It is the place void of *saṅkhāra*, without birth and where the *asekha* go without sorrow. As *bhava* (becoming) is the object of *kāma*, *rūpa* and *arūpa*, birth occurs by the power of *kāma*, *rūpa* and *arūpa*. In other words, when there is *kāma*, *rūpa* or *arūpa* as cause of *bhava*, so there is birth in a realm of existence. Similarly, when *nibbāna* is an object, an *āyatana*, of *maggañāṇa* and *phalañāṇa*, it will lead to

the place of the attainment of *nibbānadhātu*, the *āyatana* (*nibbāna*). When *nibbānadhātu* is attained there is immediately a dwelling object, the *āyatana* (*nibbāna*). Therefore, the word *āyatana* extends from the object that leads to the attainment of *magga*, *phala* and *nibbānadhātu* to the dwelling place of *nibbāna-dhātu*. The three aspects of *nibbāna* can again be seen as deriving from the understanding of Luang Pho Wat Paknam and also a development of it.

For the *anattā* perspective, Payutto argues that *nibbāna* is one of two kinds of *dhammas*, namely one that is without causes and condition called *asaṅkhata-dhamma* or *visaṅkhāra*. The mind of the ordinary is enclosed bound, limited, pressed and struggling to find happiness that it lacks. However, in the mind of the enlightened, all views of *attā* are gone, so it is bright and able to see truth in all, light and free and becomes *vimariyādigata*, without boundary, which are qualities within and not to be found elsewhere. The overall picture of Payutto's thought bears a close similarity to that of Buddhādāsa's as they both advocate the ideas of two *dhammas*: conditioned (*saṅkhata-dhamma*) and unconditioned (*asaṅkhata-dhamma*), having no self or selves and only exist as *dhammas* or *dhamma*; and also the idea that the doctrine of *anattā* is a doctrine that is unique to Buddhism, that the Buddha refuted the doctrines of *ātman* of other schools prevalent at the time of the Buddha.

These differences in their understanding lead to the different ways in which they view scriptural sources. Passages which seem to support their understanding are claimed to state the reality, the whole picture and the final teaching from the ultimate point of view i.e. *nītārtha*. However, passages that do not fit in with their understanding are taken to refer only to a particular context, to not provide the complete understanding and/or to need further clarification.³⁸⁸

³⁸⁸ Again in using these two terms I am only taking their basic definitions and putting them into the context of this debate to aid the reader's understanding. The implications attached to these terms regarding the cycle of the wheel of *dharma* (*dharmacakra*) when used by Tibetan commentators to assign certain Mahāyāna texts are not implied here.

According to Payutto's understanding *sabbe dhammā anattā* is regarded a *nītārtha* teaching, for all things without exception are *anattā*. However, passages which state, for example, that *sabbe dhammā anattā* only refer to the five aggregates, in Payutto's understanding, they are *neyārtha* teaching, which is a limited meaning taken out of the whole picture. However the interpretation of the *Principle of Examination* shows a reverse of the understanding to that of Payutto, as it argues that *sabbe dhammā anattā* is, in fact, a *neyārtha* teaching, one that needs further clarification. *Nītārtha*, according to this work, is *nibbāna* is *attā*.

4.3 REPETITION OF OLD ARGUMENTS AND CANONICAL PASSAGES

To what extent do the participants in the debate simply repeat the same arguments, cite the same canonical passages? For the *attā* perspective, the sermon by the Saṅgharāja (Phae Tissadevo), Attānudiṭṭhi, has previously raised the argument that *anattā* is only realized once *attā* is attained. A similar argument is developed in the *Principle of Examination* with the idea that at the moment of enlightenment, the practitioner will see the opposite characteristics of the conditioned *dhammas* and the unconditioned *dhamma* citing from the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*. Another argument that was previously raised by the Saṅgharāja is in order to follow the saying, *attā hi attano nātho*,³⁸⁹ self is one's refuge, one must take *nibbāna* as refuge. This is emphasized by the idea that the conditioned *dhammas* are to be discarded and the unconditioned *dhamma* is to be received.

The references to taking self as refuge are also given and the argument developed in the *Principle of Examination*. It takes the saying of having *attā* as refuge, *attā* as shelter, nothing else as shel-

³⁸⁹ Dhp 380.

ter,³⁹⁰ which is parallel to the one in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*³⁹¹ quoted by the Saṅgharāja, and explains that the *attā* referred to is *nibbāna* for *nibbāna* is also described as refuge.³⁹² Further, it cites the commentarial reference to this saying describing the word *attadīpā* as *dhamma* in the *paramattha* within³⁹³ which says that it is called *dīpo* because it is an area that is surrounded by and is not flooded by the great water of *saṃsāra*.³⁹⁴

Another argument previously stated by the Saṅgharāja is that *nibbāna*, as purity, cannot exist alone, it must have an object where it is situated.³⁹⁵ That object is self, the receiver of the fruit of the purity.³⁹⁶ Similarly with *Principle of Examination*, *nibbāna-dhātu* is where the state of *nibbāna* is situated. The authors develop their understanding from the meditation method of Luang Pho Wat Paknam, thus attributing to Wat Paknam, *nibbāna-dhātu* is equated with *dhammakāya* that is *attā* that has attained *arahatta-phala* and dwells in *āyatana* (*nibbāna*).

The Saṅgharāja developed an argument where the idea of *ātman* is contrasted with his understanding of *nibbāna* as *attā*. The mind that has not been purified of the *saṅkhata-dhammas* by the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path is *anattā*. In the Brahmanic religion, the mind is what is called *ātman*. When the mind does not reach the purity of *nibbāna*, the view that the mind is *ātman* is incorrect for it is still mixed with impurities of *saṅkhata-dhammas*. However, when one has gained purity of *nibbāna*, then, one is able to see that the five aggregates the world clings to are *anattā*. A similar argument is given in the *Principle of Examination* where *attā*

³⁹⁰ D III 77.

³⁹¹ D II 100.

³⁹² Spk III 112.

³⁹³ Sv-pt II 187.

³⁹⁴ Sv-pt II 188.

³⁹⁵ *Then Banyat*, pp. 22-23.

³⁹⁶ *Then Banyat*, p. 23.

viewed by people outside Buddhism as a being, person, life, creator, doer, experiencer or possessor of own power is only a conventional designation or *sammuti paññatti*. These *attā* are seen as designated upon the five aggregates and so are only conventional and do not exist in the *paramattha*. However, the *Principle of Examination* does not directly address *ātman* as Attānudiṭṭhi does.

The other argument that is also raised – one which in effect has to be raised by those who argue that *nibbāna* is *attā* – is the reading of the phrase, *sabbe dhammā anattā*, as not referring to *nibbāna*. Here, the Saṅgharāja explains that there are three kinds of *dhammas*: *saṅkhata-dhammas*, *asaṅkhata-dhamma*, and *virāga-dhamma*, which is equated with *nibbāna*. One is like an object, the other, the impurities of the object, and the last, the purity of the object. *Nibbāna* is explained by the Saṅgharāja as the *asaṅkhata-dhamma*, which has been purified of the *saṅkhata-dhammas* to become *virāga-dhamma*. The purpose of the Noble Eightfold Path thus is to separate the *asaṅkhata-dhamma* from the *saṅkhata-dhammas*. Even if ‘*sabbe dhammā anattā*’ may include *nibbāna*, it must be understood as referring to the *asaṅkhata-dhātu* that has not gained purity to become *virāga-dhamma*.³⁹⁷ This argument, although developed differently, also appears in the *Principle of Examination*. In *Principle of Examination*, there is no distinction between *asaṅkhata-dhamma* and *virāga-dhamma* and no argument of separating *asaṅkhata-dhamma* from *saṅkhata-dhammas*. But, there is an idea of *dhammakāya* that is equated with *nibbāna-dhātu* as the only *dhammakāya* that has attained *arahatta-phala*.

Using the wording of the Saṅgharāja, the lower *dhammakāya*, namely, *dhammakāya gotrabhū*, *dhammakāya sotāpanna*, *dhammakāya sakadāgāmī* and *dhammakāya anāgāmī*, are not con-

³⁹⁷ *Then Banyat*, p. 32..

ventional *attā*. They are liberated *attā* and are unconditioned. But, *dhammakāya arahatta* is totally liberated and is equated with *nibbāna-dhātu*. Therefore, the lower *dhammakāya* are also *asaṅkhata-dhamma*, but are *asaṅkhata-dhamma* that have not gained total *vimutti* (from *saṅkhata-dhammas*) to become *nibbāna-dhātu*. The word *asaṅkhata-dhamma* in *Principle of Examination* is used differently from the Saṅgharāja as synonymous with the word *nibbāna*. Thus, *asaṅkhata-dhamma* is only *dhamma* totally *vimutti* (from *saṅkhata-dhammas*). The word *saṅkhata-dhammas* is used to include *saṅkhata-dhammas* and also *asaṅkhata-dhamma* that is not totally *vimutti* from *saṅkhata-dhammas* to become *nibbāna-dhātu*.

In *Principle of Examination* the limits of ‘*sabbe dhammā anattā*’ are *dhammas* in the three realms in its entirety and also *dhammas* in the fourth realm that are still actions, still conventional and still subject to change. They do not abide according to power (*avasavattanaṭṭhena*). For example, they include the state of penetration of the Four Noble Truths and the five aggregates possessed by the *arahat* while still alive. All *paññatti-dhammas* are also included, for they do not exist in the *paramattha*. For example, *paññatti* uses of “*nibbāna*” and of “*attā*” in other religions as creator, doer, experiencer, or possessor of power are *saṅgatta dhamma*.

For the *anattā* perspective, *Anattā of the Buddha* argues that the *ātman* in Brahmanic philosophy bears very close similarities to the Buddhist teachings of *nibbāna*, but the Buddha did not call *nibbāna attā* or *ātman*. Here Buddhādāsa writes in detail about the *ātman* doctrines of Buddha’s former teachers, Āḷāra and Uddaka, the *ātman* of the Upaniṣad and the *Bhagavadgītā*. The Buddhist *nibbāna* goes beyond these because there is no more *attā* to cling to when it is attained. Similarly, Payutto emphasizes that *Dhamma* that leads to defilements, attachment and lust is not the teaching of the Buddha.

He argues that *attā* caused clinging before the time of the Buddha, especially in Brahmanic philosophy, which after the Buddha, affirmed *ātman* to become even more sublime in *paramātman-jivātman*. However, in Buddhism, all aspect of *attā* theories are rejected by the Buddha. This rejection was further affirmed in the Third Buddhist Council as recorded in the *Kathāvatthu*. However, Payutto does not directly mention Ālāra, Uddaka, the Upaniṣad or the *Bhagavadgītā*. Buddhādāsa which also advocates the idea of two *dhammas* without self or selves which only exist as *dhammas*. This principle is supported by the words, *sabbe dhammā anattā*.³⁹⁸ This argument and reference bear a lot of similarities to Payutto's.

Payutto not only mentions *sabbe dhammā anattā*, but incorporates it as his most important reference and argument. He goes into great detail, citing from the Tipiṭaka and the associated Aṭṭhakathā. Payutto claims to cite scripture directly to avoid any personal interpretations. He cites references where the four realms, *nibbāna*, or words used synonymously with *nibbāna*, are included under the word *dhammā*. Thus, for example, 'All *dhammas* are *anattā*' means all *dhammas* in the four *bhūmi* are *anattā*.³⁹⁹ The fact that 'All *dhammas* are *anattā*' intends to include even *nibbāna* is also implied by the meaning of *anattā* as powerless.⁴⁰⁰ 'All *dhammas* both conditioned (*saṅkhārā*) and unconditioned (*nibbāna*) are void of *attā*, for there is no person that is *attā*.⁴⁰¹ Payutto also repeats another important argument that was raised by Buddhādāsa — the conventional reading of the saying *attā hi attano nātho* as "self is one's own refuge."

³⁹⁸ S III 132.

³⁹⁹ Spk II 318.

⁴⁰⁰ Nidd-a I, 221; Paṭis-a I 62.

⁴⁰¹ Paṭis-a III 637.

4.4 NEW ARGUMENTS AND REFERENCES

To what extent do the participants of the debate come up with new references or arguments? I have chosen the contemporary works in the second and third chapters of the thesis because of their research and academic writing with many references in support of their perspectives. These references are common to all the works written by supporters of both sides of the debate. In contrast, the works outlined in the introduction are not as academic. Some are sermons, some are summaries and some are short articles or books. Even where they reflect a good amount of scholarship, the references cited are much fewer. Thus, in terms of references to the scriptures and commentaries, these contemporary works far exceed older works.

This, however, does not mean that newly written academic works on *nibbāna: attā* or *anattā* have increased much in number. Although the recent debate has been much publicized and discussed in Thai academic circles, hardly any new academic works have been published. Academic studies on *nibbāna* or *attā* or *anattā* in Thailand are rare. Most appear in big works such as *Buddha-dhamma*. Such books are few. Most arguments appear in the form of sermons, pamphlets, articles or short essays. However, one PhD thesis exists. It is *Nibbāna in Theravāda Buddhist Philosophy: self or non-self* by Wachara Ngamchit-charoen (written in Thai). It aims at refuting arguments that *nibbāna* is *attā* and concludes using arguments and references similar to Payutto that according the Tipiṭaka and its commentaries *nibbāna* is *anattā*.⁴⁰² After concluding, Wachara discusses how Thai and foreign scholars view the non-self nature of *nibbāna*. Views include a psychological state, Ultimate Reality, transformed consciousness and complete annihilation.⁴⁰³

⁴⁰² Wachara Ngamchitcharoen, 'Nibbāna in Theravāda Buddhist Philosophy: self or non-self' (Unpublished doctoral thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 2001).

⁴⁰³ Wachara, pp. 108 – 150. Transformed consciousness is how Peter Harvey views *nibbāna*. See Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind: Personality, Consciousness and Nirvana in Early Buddhism* (London: Routledge Curson, 2004).

Interestingly, Wachara mentions in passing a book called *Principle of Examination of Nibbāna-dhātu* (*Lakkan Pijarana Nippanthat*) by Amatathamprathip, which argues that *nibbāna* is *attā* on the basis that *anattā* is necessarily inseparable with impermanence and suffering. He responds that there is no evidence of the Buddha actually saying that *nibbāna* is *attā* or that *attā* is the dweller of the state of *nibbāna*.⁴⁰⁴ This has a slightly different title and author's name, but Wachara's thesis was completed in 2001, I believe that the book may be an earlier version of *Principle of Examination* by Phuttathamprathip which is the subject of the third chapter of my thesis. I do not have a copy of this book, so I could not compare it with the Phuttathamprathip version to see whether new arguments or references have been added or earlier ones dropped. Wachara only mentions it in passing along with views of other scholars who see *nibbāna* as *attā*. He does not see any of the *attā* arguments to carry much weight and concludes that they are groundless.

Another book worth mentioning is *Hindu-Phut: Chutyuenthitaektang* [*Hinduism-Buddhism: the difference in standpoints*] by Sumali Mahanarong-chai.⁴⁰⁵ She compares important tenets of Hinduism and Buddhism to identify their similarities and differences. Terms such as *ātman*, *dharmakāya* and *nir-vāṇa* are examined. For Buddhism, she not only cites Pāli sources, but also Mahāyāna sources. The lack of academic works implies the number of people in Thai Buddhism who keep quiet. Some just follow the teaching of their respective gurus. Others would say that *nibbāna* is beyond words or beyond all conventionality and cannot be described. Still others do not take any stance saying they have not yet reached *nibbāna* and do not know what it is like.

⁴⁰⁴ Wachara, pp. 16 – 17, 30 – 31 and 38.

⁴⁰⁵ Sumali Mahanarongchai, *Hindu-Phut: Chutyuenthitaektang* [*Hinduism-Buddhism: The different standpoints*] (Bangkok: Sukkhaphapchai, 2003).

What about arguments? The new arguments raised by these two contemporary works in chapters two and three are surprisingly few. Most arguments are re-statements, elaborations and sometimes developments of previously raised arguments. Payutto tries to completely avoid any personal interpretation or opinion. As pointed out earlier in this thesis, however, it is not possible to read the scriptures and commentaries without any interpretation and assumptions. The *Principle of Examination* stuck to old arguments, but elaborated and developed them further within the framework of the Luang Pho Wat Paknam's meditation method.

However, these works are some important new references and arguments which should be mentioned. Both works use one fundamental reference to support their perspectives -- the Four Great References (Mahāpadesa) or principle given by the commentaries of comparing references in priority order. The interpretation of which texts refer to which levels of reference are different, but both books agree that the *Suttas* or words of the Buddha in the Tipiṭaka are highest. The *Principle of Examination* first raises two new references. The first is from the *Samyuttanikāya*: 'What is impermanent is suffering. What is suffering is *anattā*'.⁴⁰⁶ The second is from the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta*: 'But inasmuch, monks, as body is *anattā*, therefore body tends to sickness and one does not get the chance in saying with regard to body, 'Let this body become thus for me. Let the body not become thus for me.'⁴⁰⁷ The book argues that these two references indicate the inseparability of the three characteristics.

Another general argument developed in *Principle of Examination* is that Lord Buddha taught the *Anattā-lakkhaṇa Sutta* to the *pañcavaggīya* who were then *sotāpanna*, the stream of *nibbāna*,

⁴⁰⁶ S III 22.

⁴⁰⁷ Vin I 13.

not to teach *anattā* (which they already knew), but to teach *attā*. Lord Buddha was teaching the characteristics of *nibbāna* and confirming to them to be the opposites of the characteristics of the five aggregates.

Like *the Principle of Examination*, Payutto does not raise many new arguments. In writing the book Payutto aims to provide referential support for his claim that the Tipiṭaka and its commentaries teach that *nibbāna is anattā* and that no word of the Buddha ever states that there is *attā* except in the conventional sense. He argues that there is no foundation for the interpretation of *nibbāna* as *attā*. He repeats the old argument that when all *saṅkhāras* are impermanent, and all *saṅkhāras* are suffering, but all *dhammas* are *anattā*. If only *saṅkhāras* are *anattā*, then, why did Buddha use the word *dhammas*? The fact that there is a change in the wording shows that all things both *saṅkhata* and *asaṅkhata* without exception are *anattā*. Payutto also points out the incorrect use of logic in the Dhammakāya Foundation document when it says that if what is impermanent is suffering and *anattā*, then what is permanent and happy ought to be *attā*.

Finally, I shall mention the one most disputed reference. Translation of this passage caused so much disagreement between the two sides that it recently resulted in delay of the publication of one edition of the Tipiṭaka: The quote is “*aniccā sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhānattā ca saṅkhatā nibbānañ c’ eva paññatti anattā iti nicchayā ti.*”⁴⁰⁸ For proponents of the *anattā* perspective, it is translated as ‘all *saṅkhāras* that are conditioned are impermanent, suffering and *anattā*, and *paññatti* and *nibbāna* are considered as *anattā*’. This is one of the most cited references in support of the *anattā* perspective. It is taken as evidence in the Tipiṭaka stating that *nibbāna* is *anattā*. But for proponents of the *attā* perspective, it is translated as

⁴⁰⁸ Vin V 86.

‘all *saṅkhāras* that are conditioned, impermanent, suffering and *anattā*, and *paññatti* that is *nibbāna*, is considered as *anattā*’. Although this statement appears in the Tipiṭaka, it was written by a monk in Sri Lanka at the time of the fifth council. Therefore, it should be classed as an *attanomati* no matter in what way it is translated. It is clear which perspective won the dispute over the translation over last two decades. The 1957, 1971, 1978 and 1982 versions have the *attā* preferred translation, but the 1987 and 1996 versions have the *anattā* preferred translation.

4.5 THE PERSPECTIVE OF PHRA THAMWISUTTHIMONGKHON (Luang Ta Mahā Boowa *nāṇasampanno*)

On page 113 of *The Principle of Examination*, the authors state that today’s venerated monks also make references to this *attā lokuttara*, then list two monks, namely, Luang Pho Wat Paknam, Phra Mongkhon Thepmuni (Sot Candasaro) and Phra Thamwisutthimongkhon (Luang Ta Mahā Boowa *nāṇasampanno*).

Phra Thamwisutthimongkhon, Luang Ta Mah Boowa, is a well-known figure in Thailand. Born in 1913, he became a monk of the forest tradition and during the 1940s practised under the guidance of Luang Pu Man Bhuridatta Thera.⁴⁰⁹ Luang Pu Man Bhuridatta’s biography was written by Luang Ta Boowa himself. He is presently residing at Wat Pa Bantat, Udonthani. Luang Ta Boowa initiated ‘Khroṅkan Chuai Chat’ [Help the Nation Project], which collected gold and money to contribute to the Bank of Thailand reserve fund from 1998 - 2004. He has also controversially announced that he became an *arhat* on 15 May 1950.

⁴⁰⁹ *Prawat Luang Ta (Luang Ta’s Biography)*, Luang Ta Mahā Boowa *Nāṇasampanno*, <http://luangta.com/resume/resume_luangta.php> [accessed 5 January 2007].

In a sermon published in 1976, Luang Ta Boowa, said the following:

As we are practising at this time and have been continually practising, proceeding in the path of avoiding all harms by stages, until the attainment of the great treasure of our hope. From that it is possible to call ‘*niccam*’ because there is nothing involved that will trouble or disturb the mind. It is not wrong to call it ‘*paramam sukham*’. Calling it *attā* wouldn’t be wrong because it is the true self that is the self of the natural principle. There is no conventionality, however great or small or even minute, involved in the mind. But it does not mean *attā* that is together with *anattā* that is another stage of conventionality which is still the path to *nibbāna*.⁴¹⁰

This has been taken and quoted by the proponents of the *attā* perspective to support their arguments. It is quoted in the second chapter of this book, and also quoted in *Ariyasat Si* [*The Four Noble Truths*],⁴¹¹ by Phra Phawanawisut-thikhun, the monk whose clerical title is now Phra Rajyanvisith, the abbot of Wat Luang Por Sodh Dhammakayaram.

However, in a sermon in 1980, Luang Ta Boowa said that *nibbāna* is neither *attā* nor *anattā*. And again in 1999, in the midst of the controversy, he said that *nibbāna* is *nibbāna* and can neither be *attā* nor *anattā*.

⁴¹⁰ Achariya Mahā Boowa Ñāṇasampanno, ‘Kwam Tai Pen Thammada’ (‘Death Is Normal’), *Tham Chud Triam (Dhamma Collection for Preparation)*, 1976,

In examining *nibbāna*, we must walk along *aniccam*, *dukkham*, *anattā*. When these are examined, then, we let go. At the level of complete *anattā*, we let go of *anattā*, we reach *nibbāna*. Then, why would *anattā* go on to be *nibbāna*? If *anattā* is *nibbāna*, then *nibbāna* would be *tilakkhaṇa*.⁴¹²

Attā is conventional, *attā* is clinging. How could *attā*, self, be *nibbāna*?⁴¹³

These two sermons are compiled together and published into a book called *Nipphan Khue Nipphan* [*Nibbāna is Nibbāna*], which argues in contradiction to his sermon in 1976 that *nibbāna* is neither *attā* nor *anattā*.

There are several ways one could view these contradictory statements by Luang Ta Boowa. One is that since 1976, he has changed his mind. However, the proponent of the *attā* perspective would argue differently along the line that the first one should be taken as *nītārtha* teaching and the second one taken as *neyārtha* teaching, that only the conventional *attā* is negated in the second sermon, whereas the first sermon talks about the ultimate *attā*. The proponent of the *anattā* perspective would dismiss both of the statements for *nibbāna* has to be one or the other, *attā* or not *attā*, a term referring to clinging and the negation of that term, it cannot be neither of these.

⁴¹² Phra Rachayanwisutthisophon, นีพพาน คือ นีพพาน (*Nipphan Khue Nipphan*) [*Nibbāna is Nibbāna*] (Bangkok: Rongphim Chuanphim: 1999), p. 68.

⁴¹³ Phra Rachayanwisutthisophon, p. 68.

4.6 THE CONTEXT OF THIS DEBATE

As I mentioned at the beginning of the first chapter, the significance of this debate is that, it represents one of many debates or controversies that have occurred in the history of Buddhism over the understanding and implication of the *anattā* doctrine. The Pudgalavāda controversy resulted in the split of the Order into various doctrinal schools. Pudgalavādins were attacked by other Buddhists for their claim that an indefinable *pudgala* (person) exists in an ultimate sense and is an irreducible entity responsible for personal continuity, the one who does deeds, experiences objects and attains *nirvāna*.

The implications of the *anattā* doctrine were questioned again when there appeared to be a tension between two streams of thought within Mahāyāna. However, this tension concerns another term closely related to *anattā*: *sūnyatā*.⁴¹⁴ In the *Perfection of Wisdom* literature, the *anātman* doctrine is extended to the doctrine that all things are empty of ‘own-existence’. This means that nothing has primary existence, an existence of irreducible essence; all are secondary existence that can be reduced into various components, in the same way that ‘person’ can be reduced into different types of *dharmas*, but as some schools would give *dharmas* primary existence, *Perfection of Wisdom* allows nothing to have this existence. In the Madhyamaka school, all things are said to be empty of ‘inherent existence’, which means that they are only constructs out of the coming together of various causes and conditions. The concept of absence of inherent existence is closely linked to the doctrine of dependent origination. That which arises and ceases from causes and conditions does not have inherent existence, i.e. it not ‘self-contained existence, existence that is not bestowed upon it at all from outside’.⁴¹⁵ Therefore, according to the understanding of this school,

⁴¹⁴ When discussing Mahāyāna schools of thoughts, I shall use Sanskrit terms instead of Pāli.

given that all are causally conditioned. There is no substantial absolute which can no longer be broken down through analysis. All things have no ultimate existence, only conventional existence. They are only concepts. With regard to *nirvāṇa*, this school teaches that *nirvāṇa* is neither existence, non-existence, both existence and non-existence, nor neither existence nor non-existence: *Nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra* are equal in being empty of inherent existence.

However, in *Tathāgata-garbha* thought, another important stream within Mahāyāna, (mentioned in my third chapter regarding the *Cūla-suññatā Sutta*), the *tathāgata-garbha* emptiness is not emptiness of own – or inherent existence as taught in the *Perfection of Wisdom* and by the Madhyamaka school. It is emptiness of ‘all defilement-stores’, but not emptiness of ‘Buddha *dharmas*’.⁴¹⁶ This kind of emptiness is, then, a more positive understanding of emptiness than the Madhyamaka, which can be seen as an adaptation from the idea in the *Cūla-suññatā Sutta*. Interpreting emptiness in this way allows the *tathāgata-garbha* to have the quality of pertaining to a substantial absolute. In the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, the *tathāgata-garbha* is said to be *ātman*. The *Srīmālādevīsīṃhanāda Sūtra* sees *tathāgata-garbha* as ‘permanent, steadfast, eternal’, ‘the support, the holder, the base of constructed [Buddha natures]’.⁴¹⁷ It has an ‘ultimate existence without beginning or end’ and ‘an unborn and undying nature’. It is ‘neither self nor sentient being, nor soul, nor personality’,⁴¹⁸ but when it is liberated from all the defilement-stores, it becomes *dharmakāya*, which has the perfections of permanence, pleasure, self and purity.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁵ Paul Williams and Anthony Tribe, *Buddhist Thought: A complete introduction to the Indian tradition* (London: Routledge, 2000) p. 145.

⁴¹⁶ *The Lion’s Roar of Queen Śrīmālā: A Buddhist Scripture on the Tathāgatagarbha Theory*, trans. by Alex Wayman and Hideko Wayman (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990), p. 99.

⁴¹⁷ *The Lion’s Roar of Queen Śrīmālā*, p. 105.

⁴¹⁸ *The Lion’s Roar of Queen Śrīmālā*, p. 106.

⁴¹⁹ *The Lion’s Roar of Queen Śrīmālā*, p. 102.

In the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga*, the four qualities of permanence, pleasure, self and purity are explained as an antidote to the mistakes of those who wrongly apply the Buddha's four remedies of impermanence, suffering, non-self and impurity to the *dharmakāya*, when the *dharmakāya* has the opposite qualities to those. The *dharmakāya* is the 'true self' in the sense that 'all conceptual elaboration in terms of self and non-self is totally stilled'.⁴²⁰ Moreover, the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga* describes the *tathāgata-garbha* as the same absolute as the *dharmakāya*. That absolute is called suchness (*tathatā*). However, that absolute when 'bound up with pollution' is called *tathāgata-garbha*. When 'free from pollution' it is called *dharmakāya*.⁴²¹

Regarding *nirvāṇa*, the *Srīmālādevīsiṃhanāda*, which advocates the idea of One Vehicle, teaches that there is only one true *nirvāṇa*, that of the Buddha. The *nirvāṇas* of *arhats* and *pratyekabuddhas* are inferior to the Buddhas'; they are partial one as *arhats* and *pratyekabuddhas* still have certain defilements left to eradicate. The *nirvāṇas* of *arhats* and *pratyekabuddhas* are the means which Buddhas use to stop them from abandoning their paths to Buddhahood. In time, they will have to carry on practising to achieve the Buddha's enlightenment. The Buddha's enlightenment is an expression of the ultimate *nirvāṇa*-realm, which is an expression of the *dharmakāya*.⁴²²

The understanding and implications of the terms *anātman* and *sūnyatā* radically diverge in the two schools of thoughts - Madhyamaka and *tathāgata-garbha* - mentioned above. The first would not accept any kind of ultimate existence whatsoever, but the second explicitly states that there is a substantial absolute. This divergence in

⁴²⁰ Arya Maitreya, Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye and Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche, *Buddha Nature, The Mahayana Uttaratantra Shastra with Commentary*, trans. by Rosemarie Fuchs (New York: Snow Lion, 2000), p. 24.

⁴²¹ *Buddha Nature, The Mahayana Uttaratantra Shastra with Commentary*, pp. 114-115.

⁴²² *The Lion's Roar of Queen Śrīmālā*, p. 92.

the basic principles of these two lines of thought has caused disagreement among Buddhists on how to view them coherently. Therefore, it is not surprising that a dispute has occurred previously over the understanding of the two concepts in Tibet. This is, the *Rangtong-Shentong* (*Rang Stong* and *Gzan Stong*) dispute. This dispute is essentially about whether to take the *Tathāgata-garbha Sūtras* literally or to interpret them under the light of Madhyamaka. Moreover, it is a dispute that concerns what constitutes *nītārtha* ultimate and *neyārtha* provisional teachings and which texts should be assigned as *nītārtha* and *neyārtha*.⁴²³

Those who hold Madhyamaka to be *nī-tārtha* are called *rangtong* (self-empty). They are represented by the dGe lugs pa school of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. This school holds that *tathāgata-garbha* is taught by the Buddha in order to convert non-Buddhists, but that the teaching itself should not to be taken literally. The *tathāgata-garbha*, then, is not a substantial absolute. In fact, *tathāgata-garbha* is emptiness of inherent existence, for it is emptiness in the minds of ordinary beings. Its causally dependent nature allows them to follow the Bodhisattva path to become Buddhas. Therefore, the statement that all beings possess the *tathāgata-garbha* means, according to the dGe lugs pa school, that they ‘have minds which can change and become Buddha minds’.⁴²⁴

Moreover, *dharmakāya* is not to be taken as a substantial absolute either. It refers to the emptiness of inherent existence of the Buddha’s pure mind as opposed to the ordinary being’s defiled mind. This reading of *tathāgata-garbha* means that *tathāgata-garbha* cannot be identical to the *dharmakāya* in the way the

⁴²³ In using these two terms in the present context, the implications of the Tibetan commentators in assigning texts into different cycles of the wheel of *dharmakāya* (*dharmacakra*) and into *nītārtha* or *neyārtha* are now implied.

⁴²⁴ Paul Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations* (London: Routledge, 1989), p.106.

tathāgata-garbha texts appear to imply. The cause of Buddhahood is radically different from Buddhahood itself. They can only be identical in the sense that they are both empty of inherent existence.⁴²⁵ For the *rangtong*, Madhyamaka teaching of the emptiness of the inherent existence of all things constitutes the final teaching of the Buddha. It is *nītārtha*, whereas the *tathāga-tagarbha* teaching is considered *neyārtha*. Only when it is seen in the light of its Madhyamaka interpretation, interpreted as empty of inherent existence, does it become *nītārtha*.

This understanding of *Tathāgata-garbha* differs markedly from that of the *Shentong* (other-empty) School. As represented, for example, by the Jo nang pa. This school holds that *tathāgata-garbha* teaching states what is ultimately true. Every being has inherently inside the *tathāgata-garbha* with the characteristics of the unconditioned. This *tathāgata-garbha* is synonymous with *dhātu* (element), *gotra* (lineage), *tathatā* (suchness), *paramārthasatya* (ultimate truth/reality), *dharmakāya*, *buddhajñāna* (Buddha's consciousness) and 'Clear Light Nature of Mind'. They are all different aspects of the same ultimate reality.⁴²⁶ This same reality in an ordinary being is called *tathāgata-garbha* and in Buddhas is called *dharmakāya*. This ultimate reality (*buddhajñāna*) is endowed with inseparable Buddha qualities and is untouched by karma and defilements even in ordinary beings.⁴²⁷ It (*dhātu*) has the four 'transcendental' qualities described as the four perfections above: transcendental purity, self, bliss and permanence.⁴²⁸ Transcendental self is a quality of uncompounded reality. Just as the Buddha understands the non-self of compounded phenomena, he also understands what is the

⁴²⁵ Paul Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism*, p. 107.

⁴²⁶ S.K. Hookham, *The Buddha Within* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), p. 182.

⁴²⁷ Hookham, p. 197.

⁴²⁸ Hookham, p. 201.

self.⁴²⁹ This self is not the self of non-Buddhists. It is non-conceptual, empty of the self of the person and self of *dharmas*. It is the ‘Tathatā Self’ or the ‘Pure Self’.⁴³⁰ Its understanding of emptiness is based on the two kinds of emptiness found in the *Srīmālā devīsīṃhanāda Sūtra*. This means that ultimate reality is an absence of faults and limiting factors, but not of reality.⁴³¹

In interpreting the *Perfection of Wisdom* and Madhyamaka, *Shentong* argues that the purpose of the *Perfection of Wisdom* is ‘for removing the fault of thinking that ultimate reality can be grasped by ordinary conceptualizing’. Ultimate reality exists but is beyond all concepts. The Madhyamaka arguments are, in fact, trying to refute ‘all conceptually created constructs about ultimate reality,’ not to refute the existence of ultimate reality itself.⁴³² These are the reasons why *shentong* considers itself Madhyamaka. For *shentong* the *tathāga-tagarbha* constitutes the final teaching of the Buddha, *nītārtha*. Whereas the emptiness of inherent existence of the absolute as suggested by the *Perfection of Wisdom* literature and Madhyamaka constitutes the second cycle of the wheel of *dharma*. It is provisional teaching, *neyārtha*. But, with the *shentong* understanding, it can be said to be *nītārtha*.

I see a lot of parallels between the contemporary Thai debate and the Tibetan *Rangtong-Shentong* dispute. The *rangtong* based its understanding on the *Perfection of Wisdom* and Madhyamaka, which argues that all things without exception are empty of own and inherent existence. The scope of the term emptiness is the same scope as that of the term *anattā* of the proponents of the *anattā* perspective, which are all things including *nibbāna*. Although the *anattā* perspective does not go so far as to say that all things have no ulti-

⁴²⁹ Hookham, p. 204.

⁴³⁰ Hookham, pp. 103 – 104.

⁴³¹ Hookham, p. 16.

⁴³² Hookham, pp. 25-26.

mate existence, only conventional existence like the *rantong*, they would argue similarly to the *rantong* that the implications of the doctrine of *anattā* is that there is nothing which is a substantial absolute. For the *anattā* perspective then, what exist in the ultimate are only *dhammas*. Just as *rangtong* sees *nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra* as both equal in being empty of inherent existence, the *anattā* perspective sees them as both equal in being empty of *attā*.

Moreover, I also see many parallels between the *Shentong* and the *attā* perspectives. They both posit kinds of substantial absolute, for the *shentong* it is the ‘ultimate reality’ of *tathāgata-garbha*, the *buddhajñāna*, the clear light nature of mind and the *dharmakāya*, the same reality from different angles, for the *attā* perspective it is the *dhammakāya*, that has attained *arahatta-phala*, *nibbāna*. These substantial absolutes are given the characteristics of the unconditioned, one characteristic being self. For *Shentong*, it is called the *tathatā* self or the pure self, for the *attā* perspective it is called the supramundane self and the self liberated from defilements. Both *shentong*’s and *attā* perspective’s selves are beyond conceptualization, for *shentong*, it is beyond the concepts of self and not self, for the *attā* perspective it is beyond conventional, designated and worldly *attā*, namely, ‘being’, ‘person’, ‘doer’, ‘creator’, ‘experiencer’ etc.

Furthermore, they both take an understanding of emptiness based on the *Cūla-suññatā Sutta* perspective to argue their points. For *shentong*, the ultimate reality is empty of defilements, but not empty of the Buddha qualities. For the *attā* perspective, *nibbāna* is empty of self means that *attā* in the ultimate sense is empty of conventional, designated and worldly *attā*. Lastly, they both have similar understandings of what constitutes provisional and final teaching. An important thinker of the Jo nang pa school, Dolpopa, has argued that the teaching that the self is neither in, nor outside of the five aggre-

gates is *nītārtha* in that it implies the existence of the true self. But, as it concentrates on the denial of self in the five aggregates, it is *neyārtha*.⁴³³ This is similar to the *attā* perspective in which references in the Tipiṭaka and commentaries, which argue that only conditioned *dhammas* are *anattā* and those which point to *attā* in the ultimate are taken to teach the final meaning, whereas those that teach that all *dhammas* are *anattā* require further clarification.

It is also very interesting to note that *shentongpas* consider *shentong* ‘to be truly accessible through meditative experience, not through conceptual understanding’.⁴³⁴ Its view is most useful for those who approach the practice of *dharma* primarily through meditation (whereas they hold that *rangtong* is most useful for those who approach practice through philosophical studies).⁴³⁵ This also parallels the proponents of the *attā* perspective’s belief that its view represents the view of practitioners as opposed to the *anattā* perspective whose proponents are dubbed as ‘scholars who do not practice’.

It should be interesting to do more detailed research on the similarities and differences of these two debates, but as there is word limit to this thesis, I can only write this much on the subject.

These parallels reveal a lot about the recurring tensions in different Buddhist traditions over the understanding and implication of two related terms: *anattā* and *suññatā*. They also reveal two similar trends in the history of Buddhist thought, one positing a substantial absolute beyond all conceptualization, and the other rejecting all kinds of substantial absolute. Just as the *rangtong* and the *anattā* perspective correspond to two types of the trend of negation of the

⁴³³ Hookham, p. 114. Dolpopa also assigns this teaching to the first cycle of the wheel of *dharma*.

⁴³⁴ ‘Yogacara Madhyamaka’, in *Buddhist Encyclopedia* <http://buddhism.2be.net/Yogacara_Madhyamaka> [accessed 19 January 2007]

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*

substantial absolute, the *shentong* and the *attā* perspective correspond to the trend of positive affirmation of the substantial absolute. Both trends are found at various points in the history of Buddhism in different traditions. Arguably, however, the positive trend is not as often found as the negative trend.

In context, this debate not only represents one of many that have occurred in the history of Buddhism over the understanding and implication of the *anattā* doctrine, but also brings to light that even in a Theravāda tradition, considered the most conservative of Buddhist traditions, which western scholars assume to teach straightforward *anattā* doctrine, there appear to be those who vehemently argue that, in fact, it is possible and logical to interpret the Pāli canon and the Theravāda commentarial traditions as positing that *nibbāna* is *attā*. This perspective can be seen as one of the many types belonging to the trend of positive affirmation of the absolute found in different traditions of Buddhism at various points in its history. It is a perspective, which argues this within the authority of the Pāli canon and commentaries. I hope that this thesis has put into question many assumptions in Western Buddhist studies regarding Theravāda Buddhist thought on the doctrine of *anattā*.

In the *Buddha Within*, looking at *shentong* understanding of self, Hookham argues that:

Some commentators have tried to maintain that this doctrine of the Supreme Self introduced by the Tathagatagarbha Sutras reflects a regression back to the old Hindu notions of the Supreme Self. However, the Self posited here does not conform to the self refuted by the Buddha (i.e. a single, permanent, independent entity residing inside or outside the

skandhas). In scriptural terms, there can be no real objection to referring to Buddha, Buddhajñana, Nirvana and so forth as the True Self, unless the concept of Buddha and so forth being propounded can be shown to be impermanent, suffering, compounded or imperfect in some way.⁴³⁶

I would like to close by suggesting that scholars of Western Buddhist Studies ought to be cautious when they come across perspectives of a substantial absolute self in any tradition of Buddhism and to really examine such perspectives carefully through proper comparative and contextual research before attempting to label the ideas non-Buddhists. This thesis has proved that a lot can be learnt about the *anattā* doctrine from the *attā* perspective. Perhaps in the light of more research the *attā* perspective may prove itself much more profound than it appears.

4.7 CONCLUSION⁴³⁷

In order to develop the wisdom to see clearly whether or not ‘*sabbe dhammā anattā*’ refers to both *saṅkhāra* and *visaṅkhāra* (*Nibbāna*), one must cultivate three kinds of wisdom, namely, wisdom from reading and hearing (*sutamaya paññā*), wisdom from thinking and reflecting (*cintāmayapaññā*) and (wisdom from meditating to experience and know directly (*bhavanāmayapaññā*). These three kinds of wisdom must be cultivated by each individual personally. Buddhism holds that one cannot realize Truth (*Dhamma*) by believ-

⁴³⁶ Hookham, p. 104.

⁴³⁷ I have translated Phra Rajyanvisith’s conclusion. He is the coordinator for all Thai Provincial Meditation Institutes, the abbot of Wat Luang Phor Sodh Dhammakayaram and my personal mentor.

ing someone else's view; only through personal practice. The debate as to whether *Nibbāna* is *Attā* or *Anattā*, therefore, must be resolved through personal practice of all three of these kinds of wisdom.

Wisdom gained through reading and hearing (*sutamaya-paññā*) can be achieved through the following words of the Buddha:

*Yad aniccaṃ taṃ dukkhaṃ
Yam dukkhaṃ tad anattā.*

That which is impermanent is suffering. That
which is suffering is *anattā*.⁴³⁸

*Sabbe saṅkhārā aniccāti yadā paññāya passati
Atha nibbindati dukkhe esa maggo visuddhiyā*

*Sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhāti yadā paññāya passati
Atha nibbindati dukkhe esa maggo visuddhiyā*

*Sabbe dhammā anattāti yadā paññāya passati
Atha nibbindati dukkhe esa maggo visuddhiyā*

All compounds (*saṅkhāra*) are impermanent.
When one understands this with wisdom, one
becomes disenchanted with suffering. This is
the path to purity.

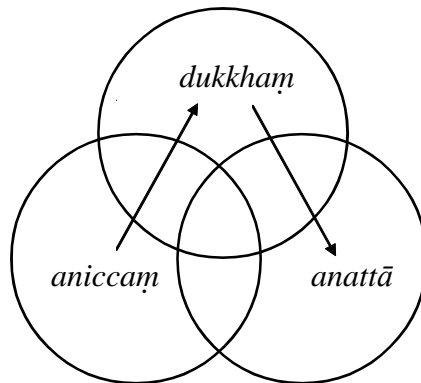
All compounds (*saṅkhāra*) are suffering.
When one understands this with wisdom, one
becomes disenchanted with suffering. This is
the path to purity.

⁴³⁸ S III, 22.

All phenomena (*dhamma*) are Non-self (*Anattā*), when one understands this with wisdom, one becomes disenchanted with suffering. This is the path to purity.⁴³⁹

Having read these words, one must reflect with *cintāmayapaññā* that the Buddha directed them to his disciple during examination of the compound *saṅkhāra* of the Five Aggregates in order to cultivate the wisdom of disenchantment, dispassion and weariness (*nibbidāñāṇa*) with compounds. At this level, the practitioner has not entered *sammatta-niyāma* and has not attained the paths and fruits (*magga-phala*) or entered the stream of *Nibbāna*. He is, thus, just an ordinary person. Therefore, these words of the Buddha cannot refer to *Nibbāna*, the unconditioned (*visaṅkhāra*) in any way.

It is clear that according to the Buddha's principle of *vipassanā*, what is impermanent is suffering, what is suffering is *anattā*. Thus impermanence and suffering point to *anattā*.

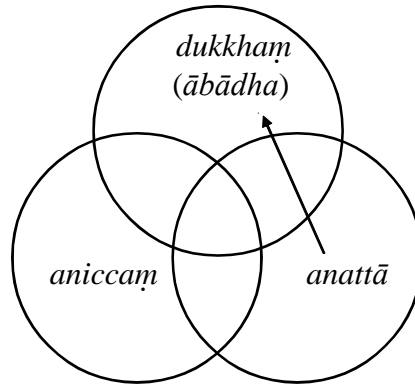


⁴³⁹ Dh, 277-280.

It is, therefore, also clear that what is *anattā* must also be impermanent and suffering as well. The Buddha shows this in the *Anattalakkhaṇa* sutta:

But inasmuch, monks, as body is *Anattā*, therefore body tends to sickness and one does not get the chance in saying in regard to body, ‘Let this body become thus for me. Let the body not become thus for me.’⁴⁴⁰

This is equivalent to saying what is *Anattā* is suffering and impermanent. *Anattā* thus points to suffering and impermanence as well.



Having only used the first two kinds of wisdom of *Sutamaya paññā* and *Cintāmayapaññā*, it is already clear from these words of the Buddha that when the practitioner sees with wisdom that all *Saṅkhāra* are impermanent and suffering and all *dhamma* are *Anattā*, one sees only all *Saṅkhāra*, and does not see *Viśaṅkhāra* in any way, even though in the last verse the Buddha uses the words ‘all *dhamma*’. The word *Sabba* or ‘all’ is explained in the *Aṭṭhakathā* as all *dhamma* states in the three *bhūmi* without exception, but in

⁴⁴⁰ Vin I, 13.

the fourth *bhūmi*, this is not without exception. There are points, which must be explained further.⁴⁴¹

Moreover, in the cultivation of *Vipassanā* or *Bhavanāmaya-paññā*, the Six Vibhāga⁴⁴² must be employed. In order to know what is impermanent, one must know the characteristics of that which is impermanent. In order to know what is suffering, one must know the characteristics of that which is suffering. And, in order to know what is *Anattā*, one must know the characteristics of that which is *Anattā*.

With regard to this, the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*⁴⁴³ and the *Aṭṭhakathā*⁴⁴⁴ have given the characteristics of *Anattā* as follows:

1. Subject to causes and conditions; changing according to them;
2. Without an owner;
3. Void of *attā*;
4. Powerless and not in accordance with one's desire;
5. Subject to aging, pain and death;
6. Opposing *attā* and opposite to *attā*.

It is, therefore, to be seen with wisdom that *Aniccaṃ*, *Dukkhaṃ* and *Anattā* are the characteristics fixed only upon all *Saṅkhāra* as the *Ammhakathā* states:

In fact, seeing *Anicca-lakkhaṇa* is also seeing *Anatta-lakkhaṇa*, because when seeing one of the three characteristics, the other two are also seen.⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴¹ M-a I, 18.

⁴⁴² Ps II, 238.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ Vbh-a, 49.

⁴⁴⁵ Ud-a, 236.

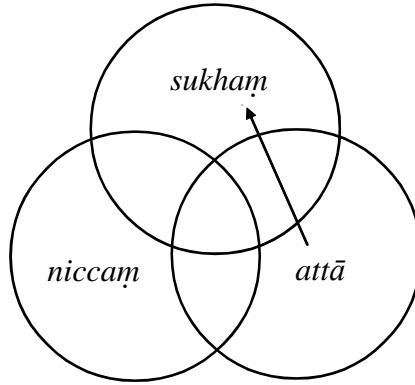
With the word *dhamma* the Fourth *Bhūmī* [Nirvana] is referred to as *Anattā*, only for *dhamma* that are neither *saṅkhāra* nor *visaṅkhāra* and are not subjected to the first two characteristics of *Aniccaṃ* and *Dukkhaṃ*. These are designated concepts (*paññatti-dhamma*). Another phenomenon (*dhamma*) in the Fourth *Bhūmī* that is *Anattā* is the motion (*kiriya*) of realization of the Four Noble Truths. This state arises and passes away, so it is still subject to the three characteristics.⁴⁴⁶ When *dhamma* in the Fourth *Bhūmī* is described as *Anattā* with the characteristic of powerlessness (*avasavattanaṭṭhena*), only this state is referred to. Even if *avasavattanaṭṭhena* is not stated explicitly, it is stated implicitly and must still be understood within this context.

Therefore, those who state that what is *Anattā* is not necessarily impermanent and suffering are contradicting the words of the Buddha.

Only after one realizes with wisdom that all *saṅkhāra* are impermanent and suffering, and all *dhamma* (except the *visaṅkhāra*) are *anattā*, can one gain *anuloma-khanti*. Thus one sees the three characteristics of *saṅkhāra* before one enters *sammatta-niyāma* or *magga-phala*. At the stage of *magga, phala* and *Nibbāna*, the practitioner shall see that the characteristics of *saṅkhāra* and *visaṅkhāra* as totally opposite. The *pañcavaggīya*, hearing the Buddha preach the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, understood the state of *saṅkhāra* in comparison with the state of *visaṅkhāra*. ‘This body is *Anattā*, therefore this body tends to sickness. Were this body *Attā*, this body would not tend to sickness.’ The word *ābādha* or ‘sickness’ is synonymous with the word *Dukkha*.

⁴⁴⁶ Ps II, 107.

Thus *Attā* of *Nibbāna* points to not suffering, which is synonymous with happiness. The epithets of *Nibbāna* are supremely happy (*paramaṃ sukhaṃ*),⁴⁴⁷ permanent (*niccaṃ*)⁴⁴⁸ and highest benefit (*paramatthaṃ*).⁴⁴⁹



Nibbāna is the *asaṅkhata-dhamma* that has characteristics of the unconditioned:

1. Arising does not occur;
2. Passing away does not occur;
3. When standing, it is not subject to change.⁴⁵⁰

This was exactly the goal of the Great Man who pursued the Truth (*Dhamma*) beyond aging, pain, death and suffering. It is permanent, perpetual, supremely happy, and eternal. Only when one has realized this, is *Bhavanāmayapaññā* based on *Sutamayapaññā* and *Cintāmayapaññā* attained.

⁴⁴⁷ Dh, 204.

⁴⁴⁸ Nd 2, 56.

⁴⁴⁹ Ps II, 238.

⁴⁵⁰ A I, 152.

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A BEGINNING MEDITATION PRACTICE

We sit upright in the regular meditation posture (Figure 1), cross-legged as seen in some Buddha images, with the right leg resting upon the left. The right hand rests on the left, palms turned upwards, with the right index finger just touching the left thumb. The body is straight and the mind is fully alert. Take a deep breath and relax the body until you feel comfortable. Close your eyelids lightly, do not press them.

In basic *samatha* practice, we use two aids: the repeated word or mantra (*parikamma-bhāvanā*) and the object of visualization (*parikamma-nimitta*). The repetition of the words “*sammā arahang*,” which is *Buddhanusati* or remembrance of the Buddha’s virtues, from the *anusati* category of meditation devices. The object of visualization is a bright, clear luminous sphere called the *aloka kasiṇa* or light object, from the *kasiṇa* meditation devices (Figure 2). Using these aids, we draw the mind inward to the centre of the body. Such concentration allows the mind components of vision, memory, thought and awareness to come together into oneness.



Figure 1: The Regular Meditation Posture



Figure 2: The Object of Visualization (Parikamma-nimitta)

Begin by mentally imagining a bright, clear, luminous sphere located just outside your nostril aperture – right at the opening of the nose – for ladies on the left-side, and for gentlemen on the right side (Figure 3 - The Path to the Centre of the Body). This is the first base at which the mind pauses. Focus your full attention at the centre of the sphere so that the four components of the mind – which are seeing, remembering, thinking and recognising – come together at one point together with the sphere. It is natural that whenever you see an object with your mind, these four mind components all function together with the object. When you focus your mind at the centre of the sphere, they all come together at that one point. This is the way we calm and concentrate our mind. The mind itself is invisible, but we can use objects visible to the mind to train it.

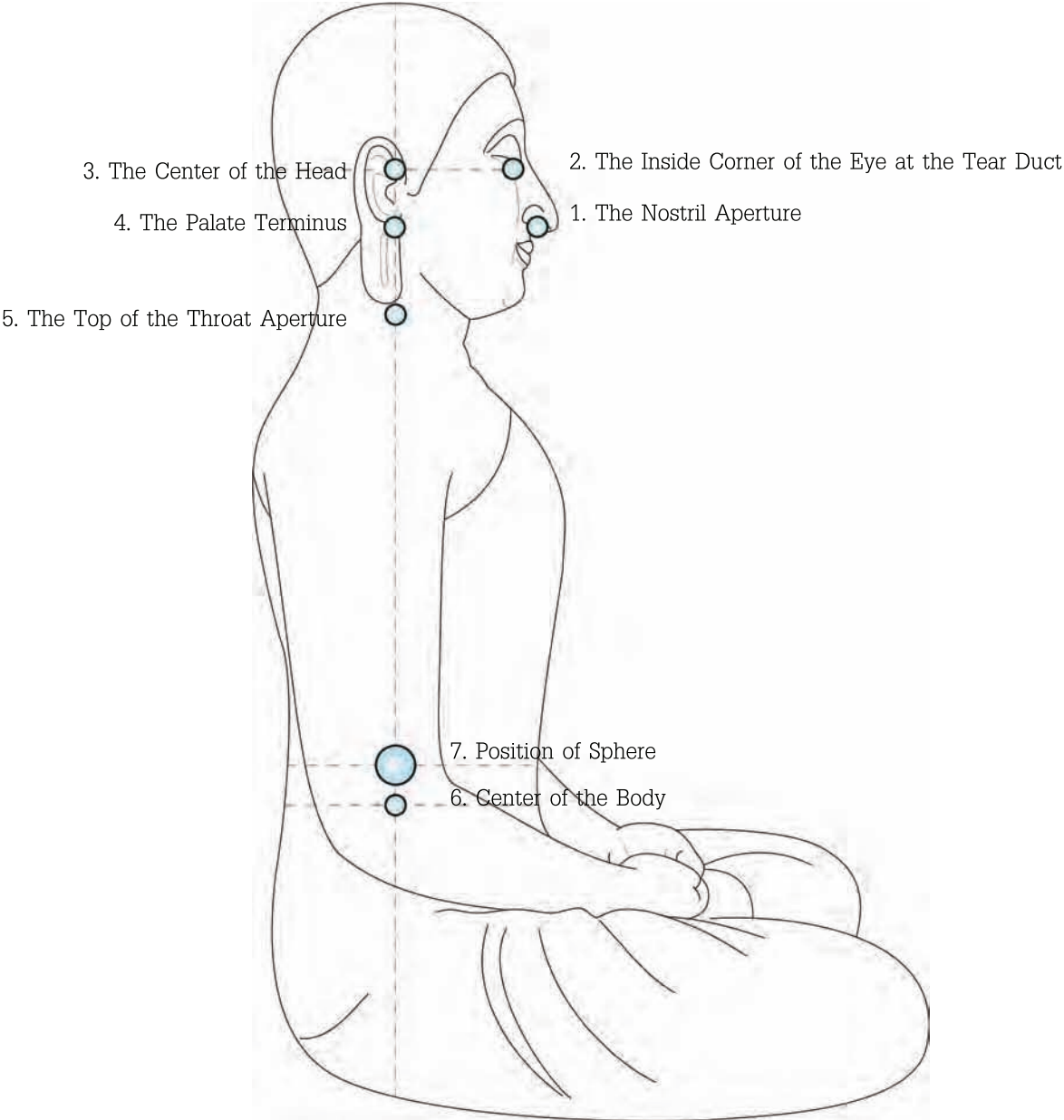


Figure 3: The Path to the Centre of the Body

While your mind is concentrated at the centre of the sphere, recite over and over to yourself the mantra or repeated words “*sammā arahang, sammā arahang, sammā arahang.*” “*Sammā*” is the Pali word for “Right,” meaning ultimately correct or True. It is the first word of each of the factors in the Noble Eightfold Path – Right speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, etc. Here, we use it as an abbreviation for “*sammā sambuddho*” meaning Lord Buddha’s Enlightened Wisdom. This recollection amounts to making the wish “May I gain wisdom.” The second word of the mantra is “*arahang*” meaning “purity.” It constitutes remembrance of Lord Buddha’s spotless freedom from defilements and amounts to the wish “May I gain purity.”

Keeping your mind at the centre of the sphere, mentally move the sphere slowly, smoothly, and gently inside the nose, upward through the nose, and over into the inside corner of the eye at the tear duct – for ladies on the left side and for gentlemen on the right side. Don’t worry about the sphere fitting inside the nose – mental objects do not have to fit into physical objects. Rest the sphere in the inside corner of the eye at the tear duct and recite “*sammā arahang*” to yourself three times. This is the second base for pausing the mind. “*sammā arahang, sammā arahang, sammā arahang.*”

Next, still keeping your mind at the centre of the sphere, bring the sphere backward to the centre of the head, at eye level. This is the third base. Rest the sphere there and repeat “*sammā arahang*” three times. “*sammā arahang, sammā arahang, sammā arahang.*”

From here, we begin to move the sphere downwards. It helps to roll the eyeballs up slightly – just gently, not too much. Keeping our mind at the centre of the sphere, we move the sphere straight to the pallet terminus – the back of the roof of the mouth. Rest the sphere there. This is the fourth base for pausing the mind. Repeat

“*sammā arahang*” three times. “*sammā arahang, sammā arahang, sammā arahang.*”

We continue the downward journey, bringing the sphere straight downward to the opening of the throat – the top of throat aperture. Keep your mind at the centre of the sphere, and rest the sphere there. This is the fifth base for pausing the mind. Repeat “*sammā arahang*” three times. “*sammā arahang, sammā arahang, sammā arahang.*”

From here, we make the long move straight down to the centre of the body at the navel level – behind the belly button. This is Position Six. It is where the breathing ends. If you take a few deep breaths and observe the breath going down, inside the body, you will see that it ends here.

You can imagine a bright, thin, clear line from the navel straight back to the backbone, and another line crosswise from left to right. These lines meet at the centre of the body. You can also visualize a third line right down the centre of the body, through the throat, crossing the first two. This is the path down which we move the sphere. Slowly, smoothly, gently – down, down, down, down. Keep your mind always at the centre of the sphere, and bring the sphere to rest at this sixth base of the mind. Repeat “*sammā arahang*” three times. “*sammā arahang, sammā arahang, sammā arahang.*”

Finally, we make our last short move back upwards, the way we came. Keeping our mind at the centre of the sphere, we move the sphere back up the central pathway to be just about 2 inches or 5 centimetres above the navel. This is the seventh and final base of the mind. This is where we will always meditate in the future. We won’t move the mind anywhere further. Rest your mind inside the sphere at Position Number Seven, and repeat “*sammā arahang*” three times.

“*sammā arahang, sammā arahang, sammā arahang.*” We have arrived.

This is the mind’s permanent resting or changing place according to wholesome, neutral or unwholesome intentions for right or wrong action or speech. Whenever a person or any other creature is born, dies, sleeps or wakens, the Dhamma Sphere which governs the body arises from the Sixth Base Position. The old Dhamma Sphere drops from the Seventh Base to the Sixth Base and the new sphere pops up from the Sixth Base to the Seventh Base position.

The Dhamma Sphere is composed of the Vision Sphere, the Memory Sphere, the Thought Sphere, and the Awareness Sphere. Keep the bright sphere resting at the centre of the body. Mentally recite the words *samma arahang* continuously to keep the sphere still and make it become brighter and clearer. Focus your mind at the bright centre of the sphere, and at the bright centre of each successive sphere that emerges. Pay no attention to any external sensation. Do not force the mind too strongly. Do not use the physical eyes to focus on the vision. Always focus on the centre of each new sphere which emerges. Rest the mind there.

Eventually, a bright clear sphere will arise. This is the Dhamma Sphere. Do not be overjoyed. Keep your mind calm in equanimity. Hold the mind still, and stop repeating *sammā arahang*. Just concentrate at the centre of the Dhamma sphere. This is your own nucleus which gives rise to this body and this mind. You should feel that your mind is in the very purest state it has ever achieved, with firm oneness. You should experience the greatest happiness that you have ever known – not happiness based on an external object, but happiness arising from within. This is due to being fully pure from the Five Hindrances.

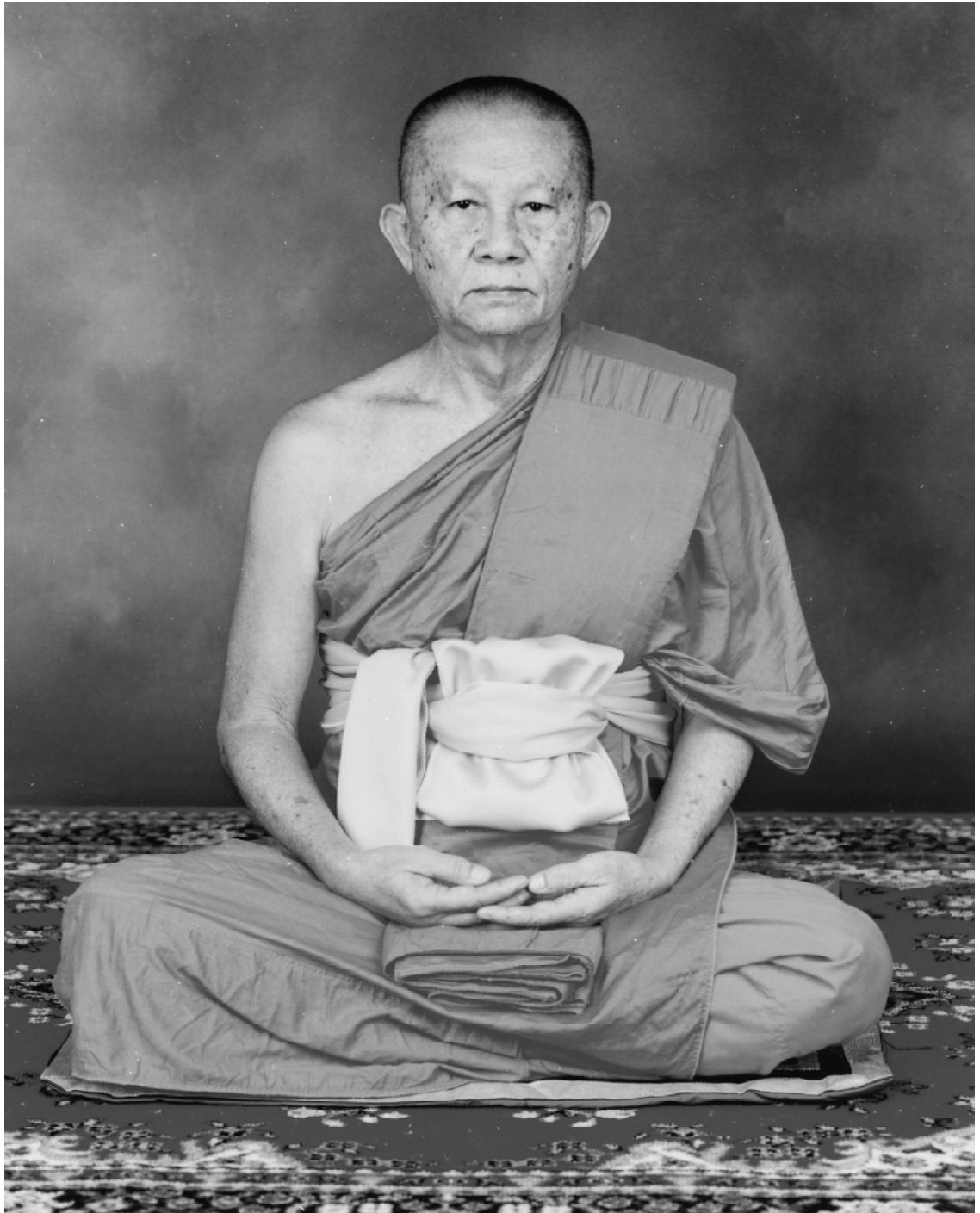
If you continue to focus the mind at the centre of the centre of each successive sphere, the centre expands itself naturally. Initially, you see sphere after sphere. Ultimately, you will come to see your own refined human body, which looks like yourself, but is much nicer and is transparent. At this point, you may begin to observe some super-normal abilities such as super-normal vision and hearing. The mind is now alert, razor-sharp, and fully prepared for *Vipassanā* Meditation. Keep practicing using this same procedure and you will achieve larger and more refined bodies until you reach Dhammakaya.

And now, let us share all of the merit that we have made in this meditation and previously – together with all of our loving kindness – with all beings everywhere throughout the universe. We share with our parents, our grand-parents, our family, our teachers and our friends.

And, we also share with any enemies – anyone with whom we may have disagreement. Let us always remember that we are all brothers and sisters together, here in this world of suffering – through birth, old age, sickness and death. We share with all celestial beings – the angels, the devas, and the brahmans. We share with all the animals and with the beings suffering in Hell, including the ghosts and the demons. May Lord Buddha bless us all to lead a peaceful, happy life, free from suffering, free from problems and free from enmity. And may this meditation help to bring us closer to transcendence and Nirvana.

And, now, we come slowly out of meditation and open the eyes.

May Lord Buddha be with all of you.



Dr. Phra Rajyanvisith (Hon. D.)

President of the National Coordination Center
of Provincial Meditation Institutes of Thailand,
Abbot of Wat Luang Phor Sodh Dhammakayaram

B**PROFILE:****DR. PHRA RAJYANVISITH (HON. D.)**

-
1. Abbot of Wat Luang Phor Sodh Dhammakayaram (July 9, 1991).
 2. President of the National Coordination Center of Provincial Meditation Institutes of Thailand (Elected by the Directors of Provincial Meditation Institutes from throughout the country at a Seminar and Practicum organized by the National Buddhist Office 23-25 April 2008 at Wat Yanawa, Bangkok, Thailand and recognized by the Sangha Body).
 3. Director and Principal-Meditation Master of Wat Luang Phor Sodh Buddhist Meditation Institute (Since 2006) *An Associated Institution of the World Buddhist University*.
 4. Vice-chairman of the Administrative Committee of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University Region 15 Academic Services Center (November 19, 2007).
 5. Director of Dhammakāya Buddhist Meditation Institute (1981).
 6. Manager of Rajburi Provincial Pali Studies Center (Appointed by the Sangha Body, October 20, 1999).
 7. Director of Rajburi Provincial Meditation Practice Center (Appointed by the Sangha Body, March 6, 2001).
 8. Director of Center for Development of Virtues and Ethics for the Security of the Nation, Religion and Monarchy (2009).

PROFILE AS A MONK

- Name:** Phra Rajyanvisith (Phra Ajahn Maha Sermchai Jayamangalo) Abbot of Wat Luang Phor Sodh Dhammakayaram, and Director of Dhammakaya Buddhist Meditation Institute
- Date of Birth:** March 6, 1929.
- Entered Monkhood:** March 6, 1986.
- Buddhist Dhamma:** Completed grade three of Buddhist Theory, and grade six of Pali studies.
- Meditation Master:** Venerable Phra Rajbrahmathera, Deputy Abbot, Meditation master, Wat Paknam
- Meditation Experience:** Practiced Buddhist meditation since 1970.
- Preceptorship:** Appointed since January 31, 1996.
- Ecclesiastical Titles:**
- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| BE 2541 (1998) | Phra Bhavana Visutthikhun |
| BE 2547 (2004) | Phra Rajyanvisith |
- Honorary Doctorates:**
- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| BE 2550 (2007) | From Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University in Buddhist Principles in Management. |
| BE 2552 (2009) | From Mahamakut Buddhist University in Religious Study in Buddhism. |

PROFILE BEFORE MONKHOOD

Work: Research specialist, United States Information Services (USIS), Bangkok.

Visiting lecturer in research methodology, research and evaluation, and public opinion surveys to various academic institutions (Thammasart University, Bangkok University, etc.)

Academic Qualifications: Certificate in accountancy, Bachelors of Commerce, and Masters of Arts in public administration (Honors), Thammasart University.

Certificate in social science research, Institute of Social Research, The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA.

Certificate in Wang OIS Management Courses, organized by USIS, Washington DC, USA.

C WAT LUANG PHOR SODH DHAMMAKAYARAM

WAT LUANG PHOR SODH DHAMMAKAYA

Wat Luang Phor Sodh Dhammakayaram Temple is located on the beautifully landscaped campus of the Dhammakaya Buddhist Meditation Institute at kilometer 14 of the Damnoen Saduak - Bangpae Road, in Damnoen Saduak District of Rajburi Province, 93 kilometers from Bangkok. It encompasses 244 rais. The 74 rais surrounding the main monastery were registered in 1991 as Wat Luang Phor Sodh Dhammakayaram, in loving memory of Luang Phor Wat Paknam, Phra Mongkol Thepmuni (Sodh Candasaro). Here is a brief Profile:

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70130, Thailand

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Websites: www.dhammacenter.org

E-mail: bmi@dhammacenter.org

DHAMMAKAYA BUDDHIST MEDITATION INSTITUTE

President

His Holiness Somdej Phra Buddhajahn: Abbot, Wat Sakesa, Sangha Council & Chairman, Acting Sangharaja Committee.

Vice-President

His Holiness Somdej Phra Maha Ratchamangkalajahn: Abbot, Wat Paknam Bhasicharoen & Sangha Council Member.

General Manager and Meditation Master

Dr. Phra Rajyanvisith (Hon. D.): Abbot, Wat Luang Phor Sodh Dhammakayaram & Coordinator, Provincial Meditation Institutes.

Financial and Property Management

Dhammakaya Buddhist Meditation Foundation.

FOUNDING

21 May 1991	Registered as a Wat by the Ministry of Education and recognized by the Sangha body
2 May 1992	Consecrated as a Temple by His Holiness Somdej Phra Buddhaghosajahn, Former Abbot of Wat Sampaya, Bangkok, and Sangha Council Member.

RECOGNIZED EXCELLENCE

- 1999 Recognized by the Sangha Body as Rajburi Provincial Pali Studies Center.
- 2004 Recognized by the Sangha Body as Rajburi Provincial Meditation Institute.
- 2005 Designated by the Sangha Body as an “Exemplary Development Temple with Noteworthy Success.”
- 2006 Established as Sangha Ecclesiastical Region 15 Academic Services Unit for Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (for four provinces).
- 2006 Wat Luang Phor Sodh Buddhist Meditation Institute established as an Associated Institution of the World Buddhist University.
- 2008 Elected the National Coordination Center of Provincial Meditation Institutes of Thailand.
- 2009 Established by the Sangha Body as the Center for Development of Virtues and Ethics for the Security of the Nation, Religion and Monarchy

OBJECTIVES

1. To help humans rid themselves of suffering and penetrate Nibbana.
2. To educate laity and monks to become knowledgeable, virtuous instructors spreading Lord Buddha's teachings.
3. To become a center of virtue supporting peace for all world beings.
4. To become a pilgrimage center for the faithful:
 - Displaying sacred objects worthy of veneration.
 - Providing a clean, beautiful, serene environment for peaceful meditation and introspection.
5. To faultlessly manage and preserve the sacred treasures and offerings of the faithful.

BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS



The Ubosota Hall is a three-story building located on its own island, surrounded by trees. Like most Wat Luang Phor Sodh buildings, it is all white, with a white roof to indicate purity. Designed by the king's architect in the late Ayuthia style, it won the award for Outstanding Preservation of Architecture in 1996.

The building features Buddha Relics and over forty Buddha images made of semi-precious gemstones or valuable metals, located at the front of the main assembly hall on the third floor. The second floor displays a large plaque listing major donors. The first floor, which can hold approximately one hundred people, has the history and rules of the wat displayed on the wall. Surrounding the main assembly hall are six small viharas or chapels, three on each side. The two middle viharas contain rare Buddha images and an image of Luang Phor Sodh. The others are used for breakout meditation groups.

The Information Center, situated at the central fork as the first building to receive visitors, is a white two-story enclosed pavilion with an extremely steep white roof. Its main Buddha image is in blessing position. There is also an image of Luang Phor Sodh where the laity can pay homage. Originally, this was a multipurpose hall for all temple activities. It has now become a museum filled with Buddha relics, Buddha statues, and related displays.



The Vihara of Luang Phor Sodh is located at the center of its own sacred island right by the central fork. It is surrounded by rare trees with historical significance for Buddhism. There are two images of Luang Phor Sodh, a large, ferocious standing image and a relatively small, approachable sitting statue that devotees love to honor with gold leaf and offerings.





The Two Twin School Buildings are three-stories high and constructed of red brick. They are located at the back, left of the campus, by the Dining Hall. These buildings get heavy use. Monks study Dhamma and Pali for the national exams.

For Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, the wat teaches Bachelors and Masters Degree programs in Buddhism. The buildings also service a continual stream of grade school and high school students coming for brief retreats. Most popular is the library with its internet connection.

Sala Somdej Dining Hall is a three-story white building which can serve up to 500 monks and novices on the second level. The first level provides both dining hall and sleeping quarters for large numbers of Laity.



The top floor is an assembly hall for up to 500 persons, used for morning and evening chanting, Sunday Dhamma practice, and major special events.



The Meditation Vihara, located in the lake, near the Abbot's residence, is the wat's most beautiful building. Four equal wings join in sweeping upward curves into a tall central tower with an onion-shaped cap.

Inside, one wing is devoted to Buddha statues and another to Buddha relics. The remainder seats about 130 meditators sitting cross-legged. Accessible from both banks of the lake by two bridges, the hall is occupied twenty-four hours a day by shifts of advanced meditators cultivating world peace. It is open on weekends for visitors to pay homage to the large golden Buddha statue and Buddha Relics.

Phra Maha Cetiya Somdej, under construction, will be a huge, four-story jediya-shaped pilgrimage and conference center displaying the wat's exceptional collection of Buddha relics. Four wings and connecting stairways come together to form a jediya shape.



The first floor will provide space for up to 2,000 lay persons to attend conferences or meditate. It will also contain the administrative offices. The second floor will provide space for up to 2,000 monks to meditate. The third floor will be a museum exhibiting Buddha statues demonstrating all the various poses as well as samples of meditation practices. The smaller fourth floor at the neck of the jediya is where the Buddha Relics will be displayed.



Finally, the grounds of the wat and institute campus are noteworthy in themselves. The first five years of site development were devoted to constructing the lake, rivers, forests and islands and planting rare and special trees from around the world. This effort won a royal award for turning the worn-out rice land back to nature. Most of the trees under which various Buddhas have become enlightened are represented.

D MEDITATION RETREATS IN ENGLISH

Wat Luang Phor Sodh Buddhist Meditation Institute, an Associated Institution of the World Buddhist University, teaches Concentration-Insight Meditation (*Samadha-Vipassanā*), which has proved astoundingly effective. Meditation proceeds to successively higher levels by always focusing at the center of the center.

MEDITATION GUIDANCE

BMI offers Meditation Guidance or semi-private tutoring in English all year round, starting whenever you choose and lasting as long as you like. If you have the time, please try to come for 10 days to two weeks, for maximum payoff. It generally requires 5-7 days to develop the inner calm necessary for rapid progress. But, individuals vary greatly, so all are welcome for either longer or briefer periods.

MEDITATION RETREATS

BMI offers three intensive retreats per year, May 1-14, August 1-14, and December 1-14. Retreats are similar to guided meditation,



but more intensive, with a sunrise meditation at 05:30. They usually involve 20-50 international meditators. Several hundred monks and laity attend the Thai retreat simultaneously in May and December. During retreats there is more access to the venerable Meditation Master in joint Thai-English sessions. This is especially useful for those who become advanced. There is also more chance to study Buddhist practices, Vinaya, Dhamma and Chanting. The large number of participants necessarily implies less silence.

CONTACT

Please see our website www.dhammacenter.org, where you can register online or **e-mail** us at bmi@dhammacenter.org or call Phra Bart at (+66) 089-068-0521 or Phra Bill at (+66) 086-364-8808.

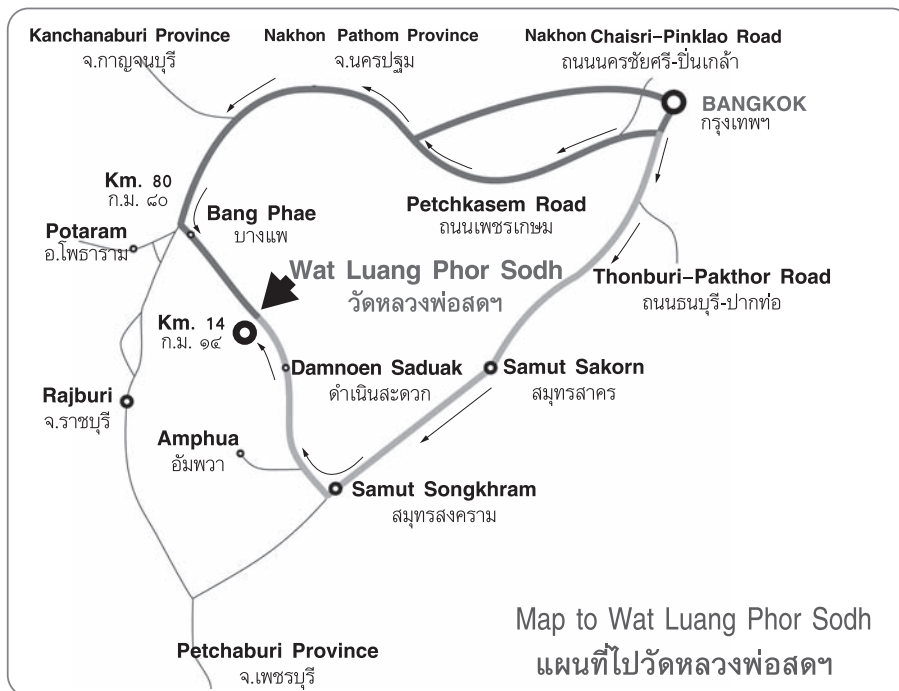
Wat Luang Phor Sodh Dhammakayaram is 2 hours southwest of Bangkok by **#78** air-conditioned bus, which leaves from the left-hand sidewalk outside the Southern Bus Terminal, every 20 minutes 06:00-19:00. **Do not look for the bus inside the station and Do Not Take Any Other Bus!!!** Look for the bus in stall #1 or by the large blue sign in English towards the back of the sidewalk which says “**No. 78 Damnoen Saduak, FLOATING MARKET.**”

Bus fare is about 70 baht, paid on board. Tell the conductress to inform you when to get down at Wat Luang Phor Sodh. Remind her again after 1.5 hours. (They often forget.) If possible, text Phra Bart (**089-068-0521**) your name and departure time as you leave Bangkok. Please arrive at the Wat between 06:00 and 18:00; it is difficult to make contact after dark. (We invite you for Lunch at 11:00.)

TRIBUTES FROM MEDITATORS AROUND THE WORLD

- **Rianne, Holland:** Extremely valuable; once in a lifetime opportunity! I will take this with me back home and enjoy Buddhism the rest of my life.
- **Pablo, Chile:** Extremely valuable; made me feel one with the world. I feel love, peaceful love for everything and everybody.
- **Lieke, Holland:** This trip has been the best thing I've ever done in my life, and the things I've learned and seen out of meditation are a very important part of it. I want to thank you so much. Never in this life will I forget about this experience, and I will definitely continue meditating at home.
- **Richard, USA:** Extremely valuable; this all too short time, none-the-less did give me an entirely new awareness of an inner world of richness and resourcefulness that wants to be known and welcomed into conscious awareness.
- **Roosmarijn, Holland:** Very valuable; my meditation studies showed me a new world and that I was capable to get there – that was more than I expected.
- **Rachel, Canada:** Extremely valuable. As we say, I “straightened my head out” ...many illusions, veils were lifted and things were sorted out ... I realized a new way to live that I had really known all along.
- **Niels, Holland:** Extremely valuable. It let me put life in a much bigger perspective than I've ever seen it in before. It showed me what's really important in life. And, it definitely encouraged me to live in a more altruistic way. (*Niels's mother was so impressed with his meditation that she also came with her friend, and both meditated to experiencing Nirvana.*)

- **Anke, Germany:** Extremely valuable. In Nirvana I was overwhelmed. I knew I don't have to doubt any more. Whatever I've seen and felt was real. I never meditated before and achieved quite much in such a short time. *(She declared herself a follower of the Buddha.*
- **Andrew, USA:** I didn't know much about Buddhism and wasn't sure what to expect. I tried to keep an open mind and couldn't have followed a better approach. I was able to purify myself mentally and spiritually. The environment of the wat emanates peace and contentment. The monks were some of the most peaceful, respectful people I have ever met and led by example rather than proselytizing. Phra Bart guided us with patience and a sense of humor. All in all, it's hard to think of a time better spent. I have become a more confident, clear-thinking person. I encourage anyone out there to give the Meditation Institute a try.
- **Steve, Singapore:** Extremely valuable! In Nirvana I saw Lord Buddha. In Heaven I felt very peaceful. In Hell I saw my grandpa. You can really experience things that you cannot see with the eye. It is very peaceful when you are in Nirvana.
- **Judith, Holland:** Very Valuable! In Heaven I saw celestial beings living on clouds and a mountain and felt peace and lightness. I've made a big step from no experience. Now I know I'm on the right way. I did not ever expect to be able to feel so calm and peaceful and happy while meditating, but also afterwards.
- **Teddi, USA:** Extremely valuable! In Nirvana I felt completely weightless, at peace and stillness. I reached a level of peace and stillness that I never had before. I'm not sure exactly what happened, but it was the most beautiful experience of my life. This is a wonderful program. Everyone was very kind and patient. The food was great! Just keep doing what you are doing!



CONTACT INFORMATION

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E-mail: bmi@dhammacenter.org

Wat Luang Phor Sodh Dhammakayaram gratefully acknowledges the generous contributions of the following donors whose munificent financial support made this publication and its incalculable contribution to the dissemination of the Dhamma possible. May Lord Buddha bless them all and all their good works.

Mr. Piyabutr and Mrs. Sujintana Cholvijarn

350,000 THB



Sayings of Lord Buddha

Truth (Sacca) or Nibbāna is a natural phenomena that is hard to see. It is without struggle or craving. It is not easy to see. Only those who have abandoned craving and defilements can know it and see it.

(Khuddaka-nikaya, 25/159/207)